



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSELETTER

Volume XI, Number 4 — July 2015

†Expert Testimony†

While I'm writing this bi-monthly President's Report for the *Nooseletter*, a handful of us are deep into preparations for the Mystery Roundup to be held on Saturday, August 22. You may have heard rumors about this event. It started several months ago when folks from the Rocky Mountain Mystery Writers of America contingent who live in Denver and surrounding areas decried the fact that mystery writers in New Mexico never have the opportunity to attend monthly RMMWA meetings in Denver.

They thought a nice solution to the problem (and coincidentally a summer jaunt for those north of New Mexico!) would be for Croak & Dagger Chapter and the RMMWA to sponsor a meeting of the two groups in Albuquerque. The idea appealed to the Croak & Dagger Board, so we said, "Yes!" and set about making plans. We secured the lovely Marriott Pyramid Hotel, just south of Paseo del Norte and west off the frontage road of I-25.

At the time we embarked on this adventure, I'd envisioned a wider group of volunteers here in Albuquerque to put it all together. A small but dedicated core of people have rolled up their sleeves and taken on the challenge. We've been meeting weekly to make sure we cover all the details and make a good showing. We all want a successful conference everyone can be proud of and enjoy.

We've managed to secure several talented folks (some of whom are members of Croak & Dagger) to be "Featured Guests" and offer a special treat to both our out-of-town visitors, and to the local members and friends who've registered for it. I'm sure you're all familiar with the talented Anne Hillerman, who has not only been a guest speaker at Croak & Dagger, but who has been a paid member for the last couple of years. Appearing with her will

be the best-selling David Morrell, creator (among other things) of the well-known Rambo character from *First Blood*. Our other special guests are Steve Brewer (a funny guy who writes witty mysteries), Joseph Badal (also a Croak & Dagger member and thriller writer), and historian, lawman, and great storyteller Don Bullis. I'm very pleased these wonderful folks have agreed to spend the day with us.

In addition, we have many other talented authors from Colorado and New Mexico who will appear on a series of panels and roundtable discussions to fill that eventful Saturday.

If you registered by the first two deadlines, congratulations! You're in for a fantastic show! If you didn't, we're gonna miss ya! The truth is, we went for a smaller room (less expense) so we could manage the costs for the day. It holds a maximum of 60 people, and we expect 52 who've already paid for their registrations. To be on the safe side, we'll only take five more of you, but it now costs \$30 to register, and it has to be done PRIOR to the conference. You can email me at: PWood73@comcast.net.

--Patricia Wood, Croak & Dagger Chapter President, 2015

Don't Miss It!
Tuesday, July 28, at 7 p.m.

Our July speaker will be Robert Kidera, a local author whose debut novel, *Red Gold*, is a thrilling tale of treasure-hunting that takes Gabe McKenna from Albuquerque to the Bandera Ice Cave and many other New Mexico locations. Come see which of his locales you've been to!

MYSTERY ROUNDUP

Registration closes soon; to hear and see and hear these authors, see www.croak-and-dagger.com

Schedule of Events

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22, 2015

- 8:00 – 8:30 Pick Up Registration Packets
8:45 – 8:55 Opening Remarks – Patricia Smith Wood, Croak and Dagger President
9:00 – 9:45 AN INTERVIEW WITH ANNE HILLERMAN and DAVID MORRELL (NM)
9:50 - 10:40 PANEL – THRILLERS
Moderator: Steve Brewer (NM)
Christine Goff (CO) Darla Bartos (CO)
Christine Jorgensen (CO) Janet Greger (NM)
10:40 – 10:55 Break
10:55 – 11:40 AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE BREWER and JOSEPH BADAL (NM)
11:45 - 12:30 - ROUNDTABLE – AMATEUR SLEUTHS and GENTLE MYSTERIES
Moderator: Laurie Sanderson Walcott (CO)
Margaret Tessler – Cozy (NM) Patricia Smith Wood – Cozy (NM)
Fleur Bradley – Middle Grade (CO) Rebecca Martinez (aka Rebecca Grace) –
Short Stories (CO)
12:30 – 2:00 Lunch and Book Table, Book Signings
2:00 – 2:55 PANEL – CONTEMPORARY TO HISTORICAL
Moderator: Rob Kresge (NM)
Ellen Byerrum – Contemporary (CO) Judith Van Gieson – Contemporary (NM)
Susan McDuffie – Historical (NM) Joseph Badal – Historical (NM)
Rebecca Bates – Historical Crime (CO)
3:00 – 3:40 CRIME IN THE SOUTHWEST – Don Bullis (NM)
3:40 - 3:55 Break
3:55- 4:45 ROUND TABLE – SUSPENSE
Moderator: Judith Van Gieson (NM)
Robert Kidera (NM) Mark Stevens (CO)
Donnell Bell (CO) M. L. Rowland (CO)
4:50 – 5:00 Closing Remarks – Patricia Smith Wood, Croak and Dagger President
5:00 – 5:30 Book Table AUTHORS PICK UP UNSOLD BOOKS BY 5:30
6:00 Dinner
7:45 Departure for GHOST TOUR
SUNDAY, AUGUST 23, BREAKFAST AND RMMWA GUESTS DEPART

Croak and Dagger Chapter Elections in November

Elections for 2016 Croak & Dagger officers will be held at the Nov 24 meeting or by email. If you are interested in being nominated as an elected (President, VP, Secretary, Treasurer/Membership) or appointed officer, please contact Vice President Anne Ziegler, annz@centurylink.net. See page 20 for this year's roster of chapter officers. Officers must be or become paid-up members of Croak & Dagger.

2015 Thriller Award Winners

During a gala banquet and celebration held on Saturday, July 11 at the Grand Hyatt in New York City, the International Thriller Writers announced the winners of the 2015 Thriller Awards.

BEST HARDCOVER NOVEL

Megan Abbott – *The Fever* (Little, Brown and Company)

BEST FIRST NOVEL

Laura McHugh – *The Weight of Blood* (Spiegel & Grau)

BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL NOVEL

Vincent Zandri – *Moonlight Weeps* (Down & Out Books)

BEST SHORT STORY

Tim L. Williams – “The Last Wrestling Bear in West Kentucky” (*Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*)

BEST YOUNG ADULT NOVEL

Elle Cosimano – *Nearly Gone* (Kathy Dawson Books)

BEST E-BOOK ORIGINAL NOVEL

C.J. Lyons – *Hard Fall* (Legacy Books)

Also receiving special recognition during the ThrillerFest X Awards Banquet:

Nelson DeMille, ThrillerMaster

In recognition of his legendary career and outstanding contributions to the thriller genre.

Kathy Reichs, Literary Silver Bullet Award

2015 Macavity Award Nominations Announced

Mystery Readers International and *Mystery Readers Journal* Macavity Award Nominations.

Nominations are made by members of MRI, subscribers to *Mystery Readers Journal*, and friends/supporters of MRI. Ballots will be sent in the next month. **This is an announcement only and not the official ballot.** Awards will be presented at Bouchercon, the World Mystery Convention, to be held in Raleigh, NC this year in October. Congratulations to all.

Macavity Award Nominees:

Best Mystery Novel

The Lewis Man, by Peter May (Quercus)

The Last Death of Jack Harbin, by Terry Shames (Seventh Street)

The Killer Next Door, by Alex Marwood (Penguin)

The Day She Died, by Catriona McPherson (Midnight Ink)

The Missing Place, by Sophie Littlefield (Gallery)

The Long Way Home, by Louise Penny (Minotaur)

Best First Mystery Novel

Invisible City, by Julia Dahl (Minotaur)

The Black Hour, by Lori Rader-Day (Seventh Street)

Someone Else’s Skin, by Sarah Hilary (Penguin)

Dear Daughter, by Elizabeth Little (Viking)

Blessed Are the Dead, by Kristi Belcamino (Witness Impulse)
Dry Bones in the Valley, by Tom Bouman (W. W. Norton)

Best Mystery-Related Nonfiction

Writes of Passage: Adventures on the Writer's Journey, edited by Hank Phillippi Ryan (Henery Press)
The Figure of the Detective: A Literary History and Analysis, by Charles Brownson (McFarland)
Poe-Land: The Hallowed Haunts of Edgar Allan Poe, by J. W. Ocker (Countryman)
400 Things Cops Know: Street Smart Lessons from a Veteran Patrolman, by Adam Plantinga (Quill Driver)

Best Mystery Short Story

“Honeymoon Sweet” by Craig Faustus Buck, in *Murder at the Beach: The Bouchercon Anthology 2014*, edited by Dana Cameron (Down & Out)
“The Shadow Knows” by Barb Goffman, in *Chesapeake Crimes: Homicidal Holidays*, edited by Donna Andrews, Barb Goffman, and Marcia Talley (Wildside)
“Howling at the Moon” by Paul D. Marks, in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, Nov. 2014
“The Proxy” by Travis Richardson, in *Thuglit #13*, Sept./Oct. 2014.
“The Odds Are Against Us” by Art Taylor, in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, Nov. 2014

Sue Feder Memorial Award: Best Historical Mystery

Queen of Hearts, by Rhys Bowen (Berkley Prime Crime)
Present Darkness, by Malla Nunn (Atria)
A Deadly Measure of Brimstone, by Catriona McPherson (Minotaur)
An Officer and a Spy, by Robert Harris (Knopf)
Hunting Shadows, by Charles Todd (Wm. Morrow)
Things Half in Shadow, by Alan Finn (Gallery)

2015 Anthony Award Nominees Announced

The Anthony Awards are given at each annual Bouchercon World Mystery Convention with the winners selected by attendees. The award is named for the late Anthony Boucher (William Anthony Parker White), well-known writer and critic from the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *New York Times*, who helped found the Mystery Writers of America. The awards will be presented at Bouchercon Raleigh: Murder Under the Oaks on October 10, 2015.

Best Mystery Novel

- *Lamentation* by Joe Clifford
- *The Secret Place* by Tana French
- *After I'm Gone* by Laura Lippman
- *The Long Way Home* by Louise Penny
- *Truth Be Told* by Hank Phillippi Ryan

Best First Mystery

- *Blessed Are the Dead* by Kristi Belcamino
- *Ice Shear* by M.P. Cooley
- *Invisible City* by Julia Dahl
- *The Life We Bury* by Allen Eskens
- *The Black Hour* by Lori Rader-Day

Best Paperback Original

- *Stay With Me* by Alison Gaylin
- *The Killer Next Door* by Alex Marwood
- *The Day She Died* by Catriona McPherson
- *World of Trouble* by Ben H. Winters
- *No Stone Unturned* by James W. Ziskin

Best Short Story

- “Honeymoon Sweet” by Craig Faustus Buck in *Murder at the Beach, The Bouchercon Anthology*
- “The Shadow Knows” by Barb Goffman, *Chesapeake Crimes: Homicidal Holidays*
- “Howling at the Moon” by Paul D. Marks, *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*
- “Of Dogs & Deceit” by John Shepphird, *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*
- “The Odds Are Against Us” by Art Taylor, *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*

Best Critical or Non-Fiction Work

- *The Figure of the Detective: A Literary History and Analysis* by Charles Brownson
- *Death Dealer: How Cops and Cadaver Dogs Brought a Killer to Justice* by Kate Clark Flora
- *Dru’s Book Musings* by Dru Ann Love
- *Poe-Land: The Hallowed Haunts of Edgar Allan Poe* by J.W. Ocker, Ed. by Hank Phillippi Ryan

Best Anthology or Collection

- *Writes of Passage: Adventures on the Writer’s Journey* edited by David Baldacci
- *Murder at the Beach: The Bouchercon Anthology 2014* edited by Dana Cameron
- *Trouble in the Heartland: Crime Fiction Inspired by the Songs of Bruce Springsteen* edited by Joe Clifford
- *In the Company of Sherlock Holmes: Stories Inspired by the Holmes Canon* edited by Laurie R. King & Leslie S. Klinger
- *Carolina Crimes: 19 Tales of Love, Lust, and Longing* edited by Karen Pullen

NOTICE OF NEW ANNUAL MYSTERY PRIZE

National Sisters in Crime has been asked to help spread the word about the Eleanor Taylor Bland Crime Fiction Writers of Color Award, an annual grant of \$1,500 for an emerging writer of color. The grant will be administered by Sisters in Crime, and the deadline for the grant application was July 5, 2015. Details are outlined on the SinC website. You can follow this link: [Eleanor Taylor Bland Crime Fiction Writers of Color Award - Sisters in Crime](#)

Steve Brewer Interview on JaneFriedman.com Blog

Interviewed by Chris Jane on Jul 15, 2015 (Used by permission)

In this 5 On interview, Steve Brewer discusses the highly coveted experience of having a book adapted to film, his personal writing and editing challenges, the tricky experience of using a pen

name, and more.

Steve Brewer is the author of more than twenty-five books, including the Bubba Mabry mysteries and the recent comic crime novels *A Box of Pandoras* and *Lost Vegas*. The first Bubba book, *Lonely Street*, was made into a 2009 Hollywood comedy starring Robert Patrick, Jay Mohr, and Joe Mantegna. In 2013, Random House imprint Alibi announced a three-book deal with Brewer. The trilogy is published under his pen name, Max Austin, and started in April 2014 with *Duke City Split*. The latest, *Duke City Desperado*, published in June 2015.

Brewer teaches part-time in the Honors College at the University of New Mexico. He's taught classes at the Midwest Writers Workshop, SouthWest Writers, and the Tony Hillerman Writers Seminar, and regularly speaks at mystery conventions. He was toastmaster at Left Coast Crime in Santa Fe, NM in 2011. He served two years on the national board of Mystery Writers of America and twice served as an Edgar Awards judge. He's also a member of International Thriller Writers and SouthWest Writers.

A graduate of the University of Arkansas–Little Rock, Brewer worked as a daily journalist for twenty-two years, then wrote a weekly syndicated column for another decade. The columns produced the material for his humor book *Trophy Husband*. Find out more at Amazon and his blog.

5 On Writing

CHRIS JANE: You finish a first draft of a novel in about three months. That seems fast to me, as someone who takes at least six months and at most a year to finish a first draft. What is your first-draft method? Do you create an outline? Follow a reliable formula?

STEVE BREWER: After I dream up the initial story idea, I do an outline of the plot. One paragraph for each chapter. The outline for a three-hundred-page book is usually about twenty pages. Once I've got that clothesline to hang things on, I start writing the first draft, trying to produce thirty to forty pages a week. I intentionally go fast, trying to capture the flow, and then spend six months on the revisions.

Imagine a desolate world in which only one book from each author is allowed. This is the book that will represent you forever. Which single book of yours would you save, and why?

It's got to be *Lonely Street*, my first novel and the one that was made into a 2009 movie. *Lonely Street* introduced bumbling private eye Bubba Mabry, who has since appeared in eight other books.

While writing *Lonely Street*, I was already thinking of a series. Bubba Mabry is such a likeable character, despite his many shortcomings, that I thought readers would want more. He's a goof, a bumbler, but he's also human in a time when too many good guys come off like superheroes. Plus, he's funny as hell.

After a few Bubba books, I started doing standalone mysteries as well. Those are my main focus these days—books about crooks with a different cast of characters for each. Bubba is told in first-person with lots of recurring characters. It's more fun for me to make up a whole bunch of new people and to jump from one character to another as the story unfolds.

When you made the switch from mystery to crime, your agent persuaded you to adopt the pen name Max Austin. Joyce Carol Oates, to explain her submission of the novel *Lives of the Twins* under the pen name Rosamond Parker, writes in a 1987 New York Times essay, “There is the possibility, however quixotic, of making a fresh start—in [Romain] Gary’s words, ‘renewing’ oneself—and not being held to severe account for it.” Have you experienced a fresh writing start as Max Austin, whether in the freedom to use a new voice or an opportunity to not feel beholden to a style, genre, or approach Steve Brewer’s readers might expect?

Because I started writing these novels before I had any sense of Max Austin, I didn’t really get that sensation. Instead, I felt the pressure to pull together three disparate storylines into a fourth book in a way that made sense. That one, not under contract yet, is called *Duke City Heat*.

And, actually, the pen name happened the other way around. I was writing these standalone novels set in Albuquerque, each starring a different cast of crooks, and my agent suggested we shop them around under a pen name. When Random House/Alibi picked up the books, they kept the pen name and marketed the books as a trilogy.

Also, I don’t consider myself having made a “switch from mystery to crime.” It’s a continuum, and all my books have elements of mystery and suspense. But I did decide, a few years ago, to specialize in books about crooks. I always find the bad guys, no matter how foolish they are, to be more interesting than the good guys.

What—if anything—about the craft of writing, so many years into it, challenges you now? That is, what’s the most hair-yanking aspect of writing a new novel? And, has what challenges you changed over the years?

I’ve been trying to write fiction for nearly thirty years now, so there aren’t many problems I haven’t already encountered. That gives a writer a confidence, I think. The biggest challenge always is boiling the story down to its essential elements. I try to name that tune in as few words as possible. As Elmore Leonard said, “Try to leave out the parts that people skip.”

When I started writing fiction at age thirty, there was a huge learning curve. I’d been a journalist since I was eighteen years old, and all I’d learned about writing there gave me a leg up over most people who are just starting out, but I still didn’t understand dialogue and pacing and dramatic structure. I did, however, know the value of rewriting. That’s where the game is won. With practice, I got better at first drafts, but I still do seven or eight revisions before I show a new manuscript to my agent/editor.

What is your standard rewrite process? What are you adding, what are you taking out, what are you likely to tweak and tweak and tweak, the way some poets will mull over “period or comma?”, and what usually needs the least amount of attention?

I write in scenes, and I always try to come in late and get out early. That is, I trim away the throat-clearing at the beginning and the wrapping-up at the end of each scene. You usually don’t need them. Just give the readers the dramatic parts. So, mostly I trim stuff. Sometimes, I go too far and have to put stuff back.

5 On Publishing

In October 2013, you wrote a blog post that was optimistic about the pen name Max Austin. In February 2015, you wrote, “I wish now I’d fought to publish under my real name.... I’ve published two dozen books under my own name and developed a small following, but that hasn’t yet translated into sales for Max Austin. In some ways, it feels like starting over after more than twenty years in the business.” Have you considered reclaiming Steve Brewer, and what would it mean professionally if you did?

I’m waiting to hear whether Alibi will want more titles in the Duke City series. If so, I’ll continue to be Max Austin for a while. Once I’m done with Alibi, however, I’m going back to my own name for all my books. It’s important to sales of my backlist.

You maintain a blog site under your real name, and when I searched, I couldn’t find a website for Max Austin. Have you received any pressure to put more marketing efforts behind the Max Austin name? And is your Goodreads bio, which begins, “Max Austin is the pseudonym of writer Steve Brewer,” a way of raging against the pseudonym?

I think my publisher distributed that tagline, so there was no rage involved. I’m happy for people to make the connection between Max Austin and me. I’m very proud of the new books. That said, I didn’t want to build a website for a brand that is likely to be temporary. Now, if my publisher wanted to build such a website

In June you gave a lecture, “How to Screw Up Your Writing Career,” during which you discussed the seven deadly sins of writers. Starting with the beginning of your fiction-writing career, what were a couple of your biggest screw-ups, whether or not they’d fall into the “deadly sins” category?

I changed agents too many times, trying to find a champion, before I figured out that you have to be your own champion. Like most newbies, I was in too big a hurry to show my stuff to agents and publishers while I was still learning the craft. I wrote two very bad books while learning. My third attempt at a novel (never published) landed me an agent. My fourth attempt was *Lonely Street*.

How did having *Lonely Street* adapted to film affect (a) immediate book sales and (b) your overall writing career?

Sad to say, it didn’t make a lot of difference in either. The movie looks good on my bio, and *Lonely Street* remains in print, but otherwise I’m just limping along like everyone else.

Many writers fantasize about not only publishing a book, but about having their published book become a movie. How did *Lonely Street* happen and what was that like?

A young moviemaker named Peter Ettinger, who grew up here in Albuquerque, wrote the screenplay and directed the movie. He was specifically looking for stories set in Albuquerque, and this was years ago, before *Breaking Bad*. It took years, but he got *LS* made. And I got a nice payday.

The years before the movie went into production were a roller coaster. I’d get word that some actor or studio was interested in the project, and I’d be bouncing around the house. Then that was out, and some new actor would be interested. More bouncing. I finally learned that this is the way

Hollywood works. Everybody is an optimist. This was a good lesson in dealing with other producers who have optioned my non-Bubba work over the years. I'm pretty calm about it all now.

When *LS* finally got made, I spent a couple of days on the set in Los Angeles, and it was a lot of fun to hang out with the actors and the crew and the technical people. Everyone was very nice to me, and I ate way too much of the free food that floats around a film set.

Peter and the producers got cross-wise during the editing process, and they forced him to add some slapstick stuff that he (and I) didn't like. The movie did the film festival circuit, then in 2009 went to DVD, where it's still available. The lack of a wide theatrical release was disappointing, but you won't catch me complaining. I know lots of authors who'd like to get Hollywood's attention. I've been lucky.

Peter and I stay in touch, and he would like to make others of my books into movies one day. Fingers crossed.

Favorite Writing Blogs by Patricia Smith Wood

1. **Anne R. Allen's Blog** (<http://annerallen.blogspot>) A note on this blog states: "Updated on Sunday—Usually." You can get tips about everything from entering contests to the do's and don't's of writing. It was named one of the 101 Best Writing Blogs by *Writers Digest* in 2013.
2. **The Blood-Red Pencil** (<http://bloodredpencil.blogspot.com>) As the name implies, this is most often advice about writing mysteries, but the same tips can apply to all writing.
3. **Live To Write and Write To Live** (<http://nhwn.wordpress.com>) This blog's subhead states: "We live to write and write to live. Professional writers talk about the craft and business of writing." This is a varied group of women with a wealth of experience in all aspects of writing.
4. **Daily Writing Tips** (<http://dailywritingtips.com>) I subscribe to this one to receive the daily grammar tips. If you go to the main website, you'll find archives of all the categories they address, and it's massive. When you need an answer to a grammar question, you'll likely find it here.
5. **Stop, You're Killing Me!!** (<http://www.stopyourekillngme.com>) "A website to die for... if you love mysteries." This is more like a newsletter which comes out twice a month. It introduces new mysteries to readers, and often offers a free copy to those who send in their names for a drawing. I won one of these a few years ago, so I know you really can win. I donated a copy of *The Easter Egg Murder* last year to be used for such a drawing.
6. **Books & Such Literary Agency** (<http://www.booksandsuch.com/blog>) This blog rotates postings among the company's stable of agents. Initially I was following a blog written by Rachel Gardner, an agent who had been recommended to me. When she switched agencies, my subscription went with her, and I now see postings from all those agents. They frequently talk about what agents look for in a book, or how to deal successfully with an agent. They also offer writing tips occasionally and discuss how the publishing industry is changing.
7. **Amber Foxx Mysteries** (<http://amberfoxxmystereies.wordpress.com>) Amber Foxx (a pseudonym) writes a blog that includes reviews of mysteries, interviews with the authors of those mysteries, and other wonderful topics relating to or helpful with writing.

Reviews

Key: PB=Paperback TP=Trade Paperback HC=Hardcover
--

Rob's Random Shots

July Case File Number One

Rock With Wings by Anne Hillerman, Harper Collins, 2015, 322 pp, HC

In this, her second outing in the Navajo mysteries featuring Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn, Sergeant Jim Chee, and his wife Officer Bernadette Manuelito, time has passed since the grievous wounding of Leaphorn that kicked off Anne's first novel, *Spider Woman's Daughter*, the previous year. Leaphorn has now recovered somewhat from his head wound and is able to speak a few words, but can express himself better by computer.

In Tony Hillerman's novels featuring this trio, they occasionally worked the same case separately, but sometimes, as in this one, husband and wife work two separate cases in scattered locations around the reservation and attempt to keep in touch by cell phone; reception is notoriously unreliable on the reservation. Jim investigates a case of a missing woman at a zombie film shoot at Monument Valley. That leads to the discovery of a possible grave in the middle of a popular hiking trail. Bernie juggles the aftermath of a seemingly routine traffic stop/bribery attempt, examines a fire scene, and finally deals with solar power development on the reservation, which encompasses parts of Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico.

Towns and locations that readers have come to love abound in this novel—Monument Valley, Goulding's Lodge, Kayenta, Crown Point, and Shiprock. And as in their previous outing, family comes to play a big part in distracting the pair—Jim Chee's cousin with big plans for Monument Valley tourism and Bernie's problems with caring for her aging

mother and dealing with her wayward sister Darlene.

It's these details that characterize Anne's take on her father's work—more glimpses into family problems that at first seem to be only distractions, but in some cases provide these two sleuths with valuable insights into the cases they work.

And not to be sidelined, the recovering Leaphorn, with encouragement from his wife Louisa, conducts valuable computer research that helps both younger officers.

The attempted murder of Leaphorn in her first book started this series with a bang. Here, disturbing developments move the two officers' investigations forward in fits and starts, with family problems and encounters with helpful or obstructive witnesses. As much as I tried to figure out motives and perpetrators, Anne Hillerman kept me off balance and foiled me more than once when I thought I had perpetrators, motives, or victims figured out.

A good mystery writer stumps her or his audience at several points before their sleuths wrap up their cases. In the best tradition of *Skinwalkers* and *A Thief of Time*, this author keeps readers engrossed and has learned her lessons well. The Hillerman brand will continue to enchant readers and I look forward to the continuation of the interaction of this original and beloved crime-solving trio. —Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net.

July Case File Number Two

Plunder of the Ancients by Lucinda Shroeder, Lyons Press (imprint of Rowman & Littlefield), 2015, Kindle version

Just as I derive great pleasure from reading and reviewing novels by authors I know and respect, it gives me a unique thrill to review this nonfiction work by an author whose previous work I've enjoyed, but who should hold a special place of honor among members of the Croak & Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime. Lucinda was an early member of our chapter and served as President in our third year. That year she set up our first joint conference for a

hundred mystery fans and writers that was held in 2007 at UNM's Continuing Education.

Just as readers enjoyed her first foray into mystery nonfiction with her undercover memoir *A Hunt for Justice*, readers will also appreciate the insight Lucinda gives us with this memoir of her undercover work on a subject dear to the hearts of all New Mexicans, natives and transplants alike: the illegal acquisition of and trade in Native American antiquities, including religious items.

Her previous book took Lucinda into dangerous ground—illegal trophy hunting in the wilds of Alaska, the lone woman on an expedition in which she was out of contact with colleagues and in great physical danger if her status as an undercover agent of the US Fish and Wildlife Service were discovered.

There is an undercurrent of danger throughout this book, but it deals far more extensively with the perils and frustrations of undercover work, threats to an agent's cover, lack of cooperation at times among competing investigative agencies, and the obstacles of putting together a case for prosecution after all the evidence has been gathered and illegal profiteers have been arrested.

We get very few memoirs of undercover work that take us as deeply into procedures, funding frustrations, and eventually into the realities of criminal prosecutions. The author shares my frustrations with trying to protect native sacred objects and sites from damage or exploitation by criminals or profiteers. There is very much another "hunt for justice" in this detailed study. Not everything about law enforcement frustration is accurately portrayed in one-hour episodes of our favorite mystery programs or movies.

New Mexican readers will greatly appreciate learning about the painstaking efforts that go into thwarting pot thieves, sacred object plunderers, and the widespread profiteering that starts in the Southwest and stretches worldwide.

--Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

July Case File Number Three

Dry Bones by Craig Johnson, Viking, 2015, 306 pp, HC

It's no secret to readers of this publication that Craig Johnson has been one of my favorite authors since I met him at the very first Tony Hillerman Writing Conference in Albuquerque a decade ago. I'm looking forward to the resumption of the *Longmire* TV series this year, but in the meantime I can satisfy my craving for great mysteries and irrepressible humor you'll find in the Longmire novels. Viewers should know that there are always major differences in film and TV adaptations, but quite a few in this series.

The plot centers around a major find, a tyrannosaurus fossil found on a Cheyenne ranch in Walt Longmire's Absaroka County just before the book opens. The discovery brings the press, an acting assistant deputy US attorney, and assorted tourists to Durant, Wyoming. Walt Longmire has to juggle all these concerns with a visit from his daughter Cady and his first grandchild. Rival claimants to the fossil lead to an upcoming bidding war that may leave the local High Plains Dinosaur Museum in the dust.

Against this, the owner of the ranch is found dead, apparently poisoned. Then an unexpected death back in Philadelphia sends Cady, the grandchild, and Undersheriff Victoria Moretti back to look into whether a killer from two books ago may be involved. But is he still alive? That discussion leads to resolution of an issue between Walt and Vic from not one, but two books ago. Fans who had to endure uncertainty through the intervening novel will get half the information we've been waiting for, but there's still an unresolved issue that neither of them brings up. If you're a series fan, you know what I'm referring to from the ending of *A Serpent's Tooth*. You'll get no spoiler from me.

Now Walt, best friend Henry Standing Bear, former Sheriff Lucian Connally, and local retired millionaire Omar Rhoads are thrown together in investigating the murder and helping sort out the dinosaur claims. After a nail-biting finish aboard a storm-tossed helicopter and rising flood waters, Walt is able to identify the killer and the highly unusual murder weapon. The fossil auction is resolved on the very last

page. You'll be surprised. I know I was. –Rob Kresge, rhresge777@comcast.net.

July Case File Number Four

Deadly Production by Terry Odell, CreateSpace, 2015, Kindle edition

Terry Odell is one of my favorite mystery authors and a member of the Rocky Mountain chapter of Mystery Writers of America. This is the fourth of her Mapleton, CO police procedural novels, and the third I've read. It's a police procedural, but still a cozy.

Let me say from the start that although Mapleton is a small town, it does not suffer from "Cabot Cove syndrome," in which dead bodies constantly fell at the feet of that town's amateur sleuth and mystery author Jessica Fletcher. But I will say that the police department seems to be well staffed for what must be a town of 10-20,000 (the population is never spelled out).

In this outing, Police Chief Gordon Hepler has survived the replacement of his nemesis the mayor, but has a new mayor to contend with. An independent movie company has come to town for location shooting and the town is swept with "Hollywood fever." Local buildings are being used for exteriors, some actors are put up in the local B&B, and residents appear in some scenes as extras. Although the production company brought contract security personnel, Gordon's cadre is stretched to the limit; hours are long and tempers can be short.

The stretched police department is stressed still further when the company's on-scene production manager is found dead in her trailer. Was she poisoned?

Here's where Odell's carefully developed sense of authenticity pays off. It will take days, perhaps a week for the small town to learn the cause of death and find out if poison or some innocent drug reaction is to blame. The state police are responsible for the lab tests. So is there a crime? A crime scene to safeguard? Meanwhile, the mayor pressures Hepler to let the movie continue, never mind about preserving a potential crime scene or questioning important people to determine alibis and possible motives.

Odell is a master at depicting a variety of characters, from deputies to citizens (Hepler's love interest Angie runs the local coffee shop/restaurant and their physical relations are somewhat disrupted by this investigation, but Odell's PG-13 rating is never in jeopardy). And while Hepler deals with frustration, a key deputy has sniffed out a possible string of murders in Mapleton, nearby towns, and on highways that may be connected. Those crimes are not solved in this book, but are well set-up for those of us fans who will get the next one as soon as it comes out. –Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

July Case File Number Five

A Murder in Mount Moriah by Mindy Quigly, Little Spot Publishing, 2013, 250 pp, Kindle version

This is a humorous cozy, the author's first outing, and takes place in a small North Carolina town. And while the mystery is believably solved by the heroine, hospital chaplain Rev Lindsay Harding, during suspenseful encounters and a chase through a Category 2 hurricane, it is the whimsy that fills this story and propels the hapless Lindsay that satisfied me more than the mystery itself.

I had high hopes for this book, since the murder of a black Civil War re-enactor with a live round during a mock battle provided the premise. He was well-known around the community for his mixed-race marriage. But the story was loaded with bad choices made by a supposedly intelligent, educated main character, along the lines of "don't do that" or "don't go in that room!"

To be fair, Ms Quigley did provide us with the most hilariously disastrous first date imaginable and I laughed out loud as those chapters outdid any sitcom or movie I've ever seen. But there were so many characters and so many family members to keep track of that I found myself wishing for a cast list and relationship notes that would have been helpful.

While I enjoy a humorous mystery as much as anyone, the heroine's constant poor choices, even in what she eats, went beyond the bounds of plausibility and I lost my "willing

suspension of disbelief” early on. –Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

July Case File Number Six

Don't Know Jack by Diane Capri, August Books, 2012, Kindle version

This book series has a sure-fire premise that I felt goes astray, but millions of readers don't agree with me. Here's a premise for authors: Identify the most popular and profitable series ever created. Then get the author's permission to write several novels with the iconic series character always off-screen. Let the sleuths in this new series constantly suspect their quarry not to be innocent of crimes, but in fact guilty. Set them on his trail and follow literally their every move and encounter for 300 pages.

Give up? The series is Lee Childs' Jack Reacher. Over the past ten or more years, Childs' brand of "loner rides bus into town, solves mysteries, rescues appropriately grateful damsels, and rides on, breaking hearts, but usually leaving no trail to follow" has been the world's top selling series. If you're not familiar with the character, this Army military police veteran owns only what he can carry and leaves no paper trail—no credit cards, car, real estate, and doesn't use his Social Security number.

But interest in Reacher is so far-reaching that each of Diane Capri's five *Hunt for Reacher* novels and a compilation of five novellas has made the author rich. I thought it was a plausible strategy to hang a series on and tried the first book. I won't be trying others.

The tiresome FBI duo that tries to dog Reacher's fading footprints, starting with events in Margrave, Georgia a decade earlier that introduced Reacher in *The Killing Floor*, encounter a fresh crime when they interview characters readers met in the first Reacher novel. I couldn't get interested in the crime that sidetracks them, but devoted fans of Lee Child must like this premise better than I did.

Workman-like prose, but no real novelty to speak of. The author does write other novels and readers may want to check her name on Amazon and see if they're any more promising. –Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

July Case File Number Seven

A Drink Before the War by Denis Lehane, Harper Collins, 1994, 350 pp, Kindle version

This is a popular and multi-faceted mystery author. Besides writing the novels that were made into the films *Mystic River*; *Gone, Baby, Gone*; and *Shelter Island*, Lehane wrote a different three-volume PI series just to perfect his entrance into the serious ranks of that genre with this novel—first in a series of five so far—featuring Boston PIs Patrick Kenzie and Angela Gennaro.

Almost everything about this debut novel clicks perfectly, from the duos' unique office location in the belfry of a Catholic church in their old neighborhood, to Patrick's flirtation and longing for Angie, a high school sweetheart he let get away and who is now married to a scary abuser, to race relations in Boston that start this book off and soon lead to a seriously scary shooting scene that takes readers by surprise. The title refers not to WWI or II, but to the start of a major gang war in Boston, with Patrick publicly in the middle.

And that brings me to this volume's most serious flaw: One bloodbath murder scene in which Patrick is at risk, then two even larger and more sustained bloodbath scenes of gang violence from which Patrick and Angie incur wounds, but barely escape with their lives.

I wanted to say it was a pleasure to start reading such a series by an award-winning master of the PI genre. But the levels of violence set this at the far end of the spectrum from cozies in the mystery genre. Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer doesn't spill this much blood in loving detail.

I found there's a series out there that pits one fan favorite PI against another, including one volume that uses Kenzie against Michael Connelly's (and my) all-time favorite, LA police detective Harry Bosch. That's part of a "face-off" series that will feature other favorite competing sleuths.

This first volume is from Patrick Kenzie's POV; I would hope some subsequent books are from Angie's. The series garners rave reviews, but I'm not sure I'm ready for another "grand

Guignol” like this one. --Rob Kresge,
rkresge777@comcast.net

The Sense of Death by Matty Dalrymple,
William Kingsfield Publishers, 2013, 326 pp
(read in Amazon e-book version)

A Philadelphia socialite goes missing. Months later, almost too late to find any reliable evidence of murder, her body turns up in a marsh at the edge of the city. But like many criminals—possibly more in real life than in fiction—the murderer eventually reveals himself through his own mistakes.

This being fiction, however, there are plenty of thrills in *The Sense of Death*, and a climax to the well-constructed plot that puts our heroine in grave danger. That heroine is the very appealing Ann Kinnear, who is not a psychic (she insists) but does have a talent for sensing spirits in old buildings, of which there are plenty in Pennsylvania.

One of Ann’s clients is eager to live in a haunted house and hires Ann to check out some possibilities. When Ann senses “something evil” about a house just off Rittenhouse Square and won’t even go inside, Detective Joe Booth gets wind of her reaction and checks her out, hoping she can help him prove who murdered Elizabeth Firth. Joe knows who did it; he just can’t prove it.

Where the obsessed killer makes his biggest mistake is finding out about Ann’s ability, tracking her down, and thinking that eliminating her will keep his secret. Not likely.

The author describes Ann’s talent in believable detail, and the reader understands why she views it as both a blessing and a curse. Apart from the solid and suspenseful plot, the characterization in *The Sense of Death* (the apt title comes from *Measure for Measure*) is outstanding. Ann’s partner in her “consulting” business is her capable brother Mike, who takes care of the business details so that Ann can focus on the difficult business of discovering what, if any, spirits inhabit a house and deciding what they want to tell owners and visitors.

Joe is an appealing character too, a shambling kind of guy who nonetheless has the instinct to persist in a hunt he knows will yield

results. I won’t tell you who the murderer is, although that’s clear from the get-go, but he’s both believable and thoroughly nasty—even if he weren’t a killer. However, there are some lovely, warm touches and relationships, even casual ones, among the many major and minor characters that bring them to realistic life.

I also enjoyed the setting, which ranges from the Jersey shore to the Main Line, and is detailed enough to be unique without overwhelming the reader with description. You always know where you are, and for me, it was nice to revisit some familiar places.

—Linda Triage (ljt23@earthlink.net)

The Pot Thief Who Studied Pythagoras by J. Michael Orenduff, Oak Tree Press, 2009, 235 pp TPB

This is the first book of the Pot Thief mystery series set in contemporary Albuquerque, New Mexico. Series protagonist Hubert Schuze owns a shop (and residence behind it) in Old Town, from which he sells antique traditional Native American pots. He also digs for pots (but never on a reservation), and therefore is called a pot thief by some, although he prefers the title treasure hunter.

On a typical slow business day, a furtive-looking man comes into the shop and tries to interest Hubert in stealing a Mogollon water jug from a museum, then selling it to him. Twenty-five thousand dollars is an enticing incentive. Hubert goes to look at the pot in the museum, and decides it can’t be successfully stolen. Soon after, a BLM agent comes to Hubert’s shop and accuses Hubert of stealing the Mogollon water jug from Bandelier National Monument. There are only two known Mogollon water jugs, so the coincidence rattles Hubert big time.

Hubert’s habit is to meet his best friend Susannah after work for Margaritas, and sometimes dinner (beware: when you read this book, you will crave New Mexican food!). Hubert discusses his shop visitors with Susannah, and she shares her day working at the

Old Town restaurant La Placita. Their routine is disrupted when a murder occurs, and Hubert is the prime suspect. They team up not only to solve the murder, but cleverly to steal the pot from the museum.

I finished the book, but couldn't relate to the characters, and didn't find the mystery interesting. Readers may enjoy the references to Albuquerque landmarks and the descriptions of local weather and customs. I certainly crave the New Mexican food they describe! --Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

Midnight in Valhalla by B.C. Stone, 2013, 214 pp

This is the second book in the Kay Francis historical mystery series. This series uniquely goes backward in time with each book. *Midnight in Valhalla* is set in 1930s Bayreuth, Germany. Kay Francis is attending the Wagner festival, and thoroughly enjoying the music and the town. One night she is awakened from a deep (drug-induced) sleep to find a dead body in her bed, and in her dazed state she pulls out the knife, just as the local police break into the room. Kay is considered the prime suspect by local

Inspector Schroeder. She must investigate the victim and all those around her in Bayreuth for the festival. The mystery of the dead body is not nearly as interesting as the historical details describing the architecture, the festival, the clothing—especially Kay's—and the food and drink. Many visitors to the festival provide plausible red herrings and distractions. Sinister thugs shadow Kay and provide menace, in addition to the policemen on Herr Schroeder's staff who are known to be following her. In a somewhat confusing scene, Kay meets with a high-ranking Nazi official. --Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

The Homecoming by JoAnn Ross, 2013 214 pp

This is the first book of the Shelter Bay romantic suspense series set in present-day

Shelter Bay, Oregon. Former Navy SEAL Sax Douchett has returned to his childhood home to rebuild his life. The former town "bad boy", he's reluctant to accept the hero status the town has now awarded him. Widow Kara Conway has returned to Shelter Bay to escape the violence of the big city. Following in her late father's footsteps as sheriff, she's determined to avoid romantic entanglements and focus on raising her young son Trey.

Sax and Kara knew each other growing up; Sax was her late husband Jared's best friend. They meet again when Sax's dog discovers a human bone on his property. When Kara's safety is threatened as she investigates the case, Sax resumes the role of her protector, as he had long ago promised when her husband was deployed. It's no surprise the two are attracted to each other, but they have many long-buried secrets to uncover and resolve before they can be comfortable as a couple. An engaging series debut introducing many interesting supporting characters and family relationships. --Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

Skinner's Ordeal by Quintin Jardine, 1997, 448 pp

This is the fifth book of the Bob Skinner police procedural mystery series set in late 20th-century Scotland. Skinner is "Scotland's toughest cop." However, investigating a major plane crash caused by sabotage nearly unravels him. For this incident, Skinner commands a task force with key players from government, espionage and law enforcement.

The unfamiliar organizational structure and chain-of-command of the various groups made it harder to me to follow plot nuances, but the story quickened pace and provided interesting surprises by its resolution. I was astonished by the abrupt cliff-hanger ending (it doesn't seem necessary to keep readers following this great series). --Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

Devil's Food by Kerry Greenwood, Poisoned Pen Press, 2009, 238 pp, TPB

This is the third book of the Corinna Chapman series set in present-day Melbourne Australia. Corinna left the ratrace and an unhappy marriage; now she owns and operates her own bakery, Earthly Delights. She has a talented and hard-working teenage baker's helper, and two teenage girls work in the shop selling her wares. Her boyfriend Daniel distributes food donations (including the bread that didn't sell that day) to the homeless all over town, most nights; the others he spends with her.

Life is pretty idyllic when suddenly her shop clerks are both poisoned by "weight loss" tea leaves they obtained from a shady character at a Goth nightclub. Corinna and her friend Meroe, who also lives and works in Corinna's apartment building, try to find who is distributing the dangerous mixture, by dressing in costume to visit the nightclub.

To add to Corinna's troubles, her mother shows up, demanding she find her missing father. Corinna's parents, Sunlight and Starshine, usually live in a commune, but once her father left, the other members of the commune threw her difficult mother out. Corinna's friends help her cope with her mother's vituperative tongue, and one neighbor actually provides the mother a place to stay, and successfully cleans her up and calms her down.

The search for her father takes Corinna and Daniel to a neighborhood of extreme poverty, and they narrowly escape violence. Corinna also ventures into a monastery, where the monks deprive themselves of flavor in their food. In the end, all works out well and justice is done. While following Corinna as she unravels mysteries is interesting, what I like most about this series is the glimpse into an alternate lifestyle, in a distant setting/culture, with a humorous cast of quirky characters.

Murder on Lenox Hill by Victoria Thompson, 2005, 291 pp

This is the seventh book of the Gaslight Mystery series set in turn-of-the-20th-century New York City. Widow Sarah Brandt is a midwife, serving the poorest neighborhoods, forsaking the elite Knickerbocker lifestyle she is entitled to by birth. Detective Sergeant Frank Malloy is a rare honest policeman (not taking bribes), working hard to support his mother and deaf son Brian. Sarah's and Frank's paths cross on murder investigations, when Sarah is able to enter high-society parlors and speak freely with those of her "class", who are not willing to reveal the truth to a policeman. Solving cases together and helping each other in times of crisis, they have forged a solid friendship, almost but not quite blossoming into courtship. Frank is certain he can never be more than a friend to Sarah, due to her "high birth". In this installment, Sarah is asked to handle a matter of the utmost confidentiality by the high-society Linton family of Lenox Hill. Their teenage daughter, who is mentally a young child, is pregnant. They have no idea how that is possible, since she is always at home or at church. As Sarah and Frank investigate the church and its minister, Reverend Oliver Upchurch, each senses at once something is not right in the minister's conduct. They eventually uncover a crime with many more victims. By the time the minister dies, the general consensus is good riddance; but Frank still must determine cause of death, motive, and killer. Sarah finally uncovers the truth about the pregnancy when she stops making a basic assumption, and asks the right questions. —Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

Vertigo 42 by Martha Grimes, 2014, 336 pp

This is the 23rd book of the Richard Jury mystery series set in contemporary England. Jury is wine and dined in an exclusive restaurant, and asked by a wealthy man to look into his wife's death years ago. The widower

does not believe in the verdict of accidental death. He thinks it's related to a child's death decades ago on their property, for which his wife was investigated and cleared.

In a current case for local police, and eventually Scotland Yard, a flashily-dressed woman fell to her death from a tower in an isolated area. Her death is not likely accidental, although it was arranged to appear so. A stray dog named Stanley appears in Melrose Plant's neck-of-the-woods, as well as a stranger looking for the dog.

Can all these incidents be related? Yes, Richard Jury discovers, but it is quite a puzzle for him to work out. All the favorite series characters are in the story, if only briefly; each provides a hint or a clue for Jury, even his nemesis at The Old Wine Shades. Delightful, witty, complex, entertaining and rewarding as always. (Editor's note: All the Richard Jury novels have titles with the names of English pubs) --Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

A Deeper Sleep by Dana Stabenow, 2006, 272 pp

This is the 15th book of the Kate Shugak mystery series set in contemporary Alaska. Native Alaskan (Aleut) Kate lives with adopted teenager Johnny and wolf dog Mutt on a homestead in "The Park". Kate works as a PI for the Anchorage DA, while the Aleut "Aunties" pressure Kate to take her place as a tribe elder.

Kate and Alaska State Trooper Jim Chopin are eager to see monster Louis Deems, vicious murderer of three wives, finally convicted and sentenced. But the monster goes free, yet again. Next, Deem sets his sights on a young woman in a religious-cult-like family that is building a substantial home and violating land rights. When two of Kate's and Johnny's "park rat" friends are shot, eyewitness Johnny picks Deem from a lineup. Before the law can serve justice, someone kills Deem. No one else grieves or wants Deem's killer identified or

apprehended, but Kate and Jim must find out the truth. What did Deem expect to gain from marrying the Smith daughter? **Spoiler Alert:** Prepare for strong emotional impact—Kate's beloved Mutt gets shot.—Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

Elegy for Eddie by Jacqueline Winspear, 2012, 335 pp

This is the ninth book of the Maisie Dobbs mystery series, set in post WWI England. Maisie has a very successful life. Born into the servant class, she started out as a housemaid for the Compton family, showed great initiative and intelligence, was educated with the well-born children on the Compton estate, trained with the Comptons' professional friend, forensic psychologist Dr. Maurice Blanche, served in WWI as a nurse, set up her own business as a private inquiry agent, inherited great wealth from Maurice, and is in a love affair with James Compton.

But her life is not quite perfect: Maisie puts her wealth to use helping her assistants, family and friends—with perhaps a bit too much control, her best friends suggest. Maisie feels suffocated when attending society events with James and doesn't want to discuss that relationship with her father or friends.

A group of men Maisie knew from childhood ask her to investigate the death of mutual friend Eddie, a gentle, slow-minded man who had tremendous talent training horses. He was killed in an accident at a printing house, but all knew something was troubling him prior to the event. Maisie and her assistant Billy begin questioning those at the printing house, as well as Eddie's mother. Maisie learns Jimmy Merton, a man who had bullied Eddie all his life, was there in the printing house that day. It is easy to assume Merton guilty and case closed, especially after Merton's death. But Maisie wants the true explanation of events (far more complex); she researches the past for part of the solution, and has to question her

dearest friends for the rest, which is based on the dangerous political climate.

An interesting story with many subplots dealing with human relationships, while conveying social mores and political atmosphere of the time. A pervasive undertone is Maisie's dissatisfaction with her life. --Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

Death Lives Next Door by Gwendoline Butler, 1994, 253 pp

This is the first book of the John Coffin mystery series set in late-20th-century Oxford, England. Perpetual scholar Ezra notices a man is watching his friend Dr. Marion Manning, anthropologist and university professor. She knows she's being followed and watched; so does her flamboyant housekeeper Joyo. Marion prefers not to confront the watcher, just act oblivious to his presence. But the watcher gets bolder, and one night enters her house. Marion calls for Ezra's help.

Ezra's irritating girlfriend Rachel has also noticed the watcher, but her attention is focused on trying to change Ezra into an ambitious career-minded go-getter (hopeless). When the watcher is killed, John Coffin arrives from Scotland Yard to assist the local police in the investigation. The full explanation of events is entirely based upon the past history of the primary characters. I found the characters unappealing, but I enjoyed the witty prose:

"Meanwhile Ezra had almost walked himself into the quarrel Rachel had waiting for him." -- Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

Death on Blackheath by Anne Perry, 2014, 320 pp

This is the 29th book of the Charlotte and Thomas Pitt mystery series set in Victorian England. This is one of the most complex plots in the series, with many references to events in book #4, *Resurrection Row*, and plenty of

satisfying action by many favorite series characters. Pitt is now head of Special Branch of Scotland Yard, which he has the talent to fill, although many would prefer a man from high society in that position of power. Pitt has a right-hand man, Stoker, whom he can trust completely, as Narraway trusted Pitt when they held the same jobs.

Pitt and Stoker are called to a high-society house where a lady's maid has disappeared under suspicious circumstances. A mutilated body, feared to be the missing maid, is found in a nearby gravel pit. Special Branch is involved because homeowner Dudley Kynaston is an important figure in naval and weapons research for the government. If a crime has been committed by or endangering Kynaston, then Special Branch will consider it a matter of national security. They are unable to prove or disprove the identity of the body in the gravel pit, and Kynaston's statements leave gaping holes at critical times, so Pitt and Stoker must stay on the case.

MP Somerset Carlisle raises public sensation about the case, and Pitt is threatened by Talbot, a government official, to hurry up and finish his investigation without bothering Kynaston.

Pitt's sister-in-law Emily is bored, worried that her husband Jack is losing interest, because he will not discuss his professional concerns with her. Jack is considering working for Kynaston. Emily fears Jack will be humiliated again by trusting the wrong person. Emily also wants credit for sleuthing herself (not shared with Charlotte) so she befriends Dudley Kynaston's wife.

When a second body is found, Pitt suspects the bodies are purposely intended to point to Kynaston. Since Pitt's suspicions involve high society and political intrigue well above his power, he enlists Vespasia's help. She and Narraway exert influence and call in favors as needed.

Meanwhile, Stoker thoroughly researches the missing maid's life, finds her boyfriend, and uses his powerful intuition to discover where she is hiding.

It's really enjoyable how each character's efforts contribute pieces to the puzzle, which fit together into a suspenseful and satisfying conclusion.—Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

Kinsey and Me by Sue Grafton, 2013, 286 pp

This is a collection of short stories with author comments. The first half features her *Alphabet series* protagonist Kinsey Millhone; the second half contains autobiographical short stories with a protagonist named Kit. Kinsey is at her usual resourceful and spunky best in these adventures. By contrast, the dysfunctional family portrayed in Kit's memoirs casts a grim mood. I recommend the first half to any fellow Kinsey Millhone fans.—Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

The Empress File by John Sandford, 1991, 368 pp

This is book two of the Kidd and LuEllen mystery thriller series. Set in a small Southern town along the Mississippi, it delivers all the stereotypes: bigotry, racism, corruption, a political "machine", a beautiful young black couple who want to change it all for the better. Kidd is a master con artist, LuEllen a master burglar; they pull off a few key robberies, just to demoralize the bad guys (and of course gain some booty) even before they 'officially' arrive and check-in (covertly of course) with the young black couple. Kidd and LuEllen have the advantage of master hacker Bobby breaking into any/all confidential databases to pull private info on the town council members they plan to bring down.

Kidd and LuEllen arrive on a houseboat; Kidd's disguise is true and easy to maintain (he really is a painter; one of the council members has one of his paintings) and he really does

enjoy sketching scenes and capturing the light. LuEllen wears a crystal necklace and owns a supposedly magical crystal ball—since Bobby's research told them the town mayor is superstitious. Between the rigged crystal ball and Kidd's tarot readings, they fool the mayor very well. The most dangerous thug they never fool is Duane Hill, the dogcatcher. In all his appearances in the story he's violent, cruel, vicious (you've been warned). Kidd and LuEllen mostly pull it off, but of course there must be hiccups to add suspense. —Susan Zates, Susan.Zates@abbott.com

†Nooseletter Submissions†

Croak & Dagger members and friends are encouraged to contribute articles, reviews, and essays on aspects of mystery writing *and* reading for publication consideration. 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 shorter 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 submissions via e-mail to Rob Kresge at rkresge777@comcast.net, with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

The *Nooseletter* is distributed to all paid-up members electronically. ♦

COPYRIGHT © OF MATERIAL PUBLISHED HEREIN REMAINS THE PROPERTY OF INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS. NO PART OF THIS PUBLICATION MAY BE REPRINTED WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHOR(S)

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, July 28

Tuesday, August 28

Tuesday, September 22

Meetings are free and open to the public.

As of April, meetings will be held every fourth Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m., in Room 6 at the North Domingo Baca Multigenerational Center, 7521 Carmel Ave, NE, one traffic light north of Paseo del Norte, off Wyoming Blvd.

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

Our July speaker will be Albuquerque author **Robert Kidera**, whose first novel is *Red Gold*. “If you’re going through hell, keep going...” Shaken by the death of his beloved wife and wrestling with powerful personal demons, Professor Gabriel McKenna leaves New York City for New Mexico to claim an inheritance from mysterious distant relatives. He finds something other than a Land of Enchantment.

Our August speaker will be **Dr. Gloria Casale**. Among her many professional interests are the international transport of pathogens, bioterrorism and bioterrorism response, travel medicine, and contemporary medical-legal problems. She has published many articles and has presented at national and international scientific meetings. In addition, she has spoken to several branches of the US Armed Forces to increase their understanding of the threat of bio-weaponry. Her 2013 novel *Bioterror* was awarded Honorable Mention by the Public Safety Writer’s Association.

Our September speaker will be **Professor Irene Blea**, Univ of California—Los Angeles, whose most recent novel, *Daughters of the West Mesa*,

is based on the still unsolved 11 West Mesa murders that took place in Albuquerque during the last decade and were discovered in 2009. The novel tells the story of a single mother whose daughter is missing while the remains of 11 women and an unborn fetus are discovered near her home. In the process of writing the book, Professor Blea set up a support group to monitor more promptly whether any additional streetwalkers disappear in Albuquerque.

The 2015 C&D Chapter Line Up

President – Pat Wood –

pwood73@comcast.net

Vice President – Anne Zeigler –

annz1@centurylink.net

Secretary – Olin Bray –

www.robertkresge.com

Treasurer/Membership – Fred Aiken –

FAAiken@aol.com

Member at Large – Joan Spicci Saberhagen

joan@joanspicci.com

Programs/Publicity – Rita Herther –

RMHerther@aol.com

Website Coordinator – Susan Zates –

smzates@yahoo.com

Nooseletter Editor – Rob Kresge –

rkresge777@comcast.net



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!”



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.