



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



# THE NOOSELETTER

Volume X, Number 2 — March/April 2016

## †Expert Testimony†

Well, fellow mystery lovers, if you don't have weather whiplash by now, you must be spending the winter in Florida this year. Seriously! In the first month and a half we went from ridiculously cold—the kind of cold accompanied by high humidity—to the lovely, sunny day we had on February 14, aka Valentine's Day.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining about the sun and warmth. But it does give false hope to the growing things in the yard that it's time to bloom. And just like me, they'll have their dreams of spring smashed with the next deep freeze and blowing snow!

When our members receive this newsletter, it will already be March, and that truly is the month when the first day of spring officially arrives. We'll be looking ahead to our meeting on March 22, 2016 when Jan Arrington-Wolcott is our guest speaker. (Did I already mention we did NOT meet on February 23??) We are looking forward to welcoming Jan to Croak & Dagger, and I hope we have a big turnout.

What else are we doing? Well, if you attended Left Coast Crime in Phoenix during the last week of February, we would love to hear your account. Please send your report on that, or on any other conference for writers/readers you've attended, to Linda Triegel, our tireless Nooseletter editor. You'll find Linda's email address on page 2.

Also in March, our board of directors will have their regular meeting. We invite all our members to reach out to anyone on the board and let us know what you'd like to see us doing

as a chapter. We're already throwing out the idea of a possible anthology. It's just in the talking stage and that will be a very time-consuming project. If we decide to do it (and that's NOT a guarantee) we'll need lots and lots of help from you, our members. So if that interests you, let us know. And if you've ever thought of giving service to the group, we can always use help with the various committee jobs. It's a good way to become more involved, and have lots of fun while serving.

And by the way, unless you paid your dues last year AFTER September 1, 2015, you are once again due. Please send your \$20 checks to Croak & Dagger Chapter, PO Box 16597, Albuquerque, NM 87191-6597. You can also pay at the March meeting. Don't forget to ask for your lovely new membership card when you pay your dues. That way, you'll always know when dues are due again!

I hope to see all of you in March!

— Pat Wood, President

### **Don't Miss It!** **Tuesday, March 22, at 7 p.m.**

**Jann Arrington-Wolcott**, our March speaker, is a former journalist and magazine writer. She was a Founding Member of Women Writing the West and a Founding Faculty Member of the Tony Hillerman Writing Conference. Jann's first novel, *Brujo*, sold internationally and was filmed as a TV movie titled *Seduced by Evil* in 1998. Her new thriller, *Deathmark*, was published to rave reviews in July 2014.

**April's speaker** will be a familiar face to members. **Joe Badal** has had nine award-winning, best-selling suspense novels published. His stand-alone novels include *The Pythagorean Solution*, *Ultimate Betrayal*, and *Borderline*. His Danforth Saga now includes five books, most recently *Death Ship*, released in November 2015. His next novel, *The Motive*, the first in his Cycle of Violence series, will be released in mid-2016. Joe also writes a blog titled *Everyday Heroes*, which can be viewed at <http://josephbadalbooks.com>.

Prior to a long finance career, Joe served as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army in key highly classified positions in the U.S. and overseas, earning numerous military decorations. He holds degrees in International Finance and Business Administration, and is multi-lingual.

On Joe's website, he says, "Storytelling has been a vital part of my family's culture. My father passed on stories that his grandfather and father told him, and created epic tales that included his children as characters.... Listening to stories and reading as many books as I could carry from the public library were the foundation for my passion for writing."

#

The Albuquerque Croak & Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime welcomes mystery fans, readers, and writers who want to enjoy felonious fun, absolutely criminal companionship and sensational speakers. C&D meetings are held in the North Domingo Baca Multigenerational Center at 7521 Carmel Avenue NE, north of Paseo del Norte and west of Wyoming. Unless otherwise noted in the Nooseletter or our website, programs are free and open to the public.



**Sisters  
in  
Crime**

Sisters in Crime was founded in 1986. *The mission of Sisters in Crime shall be "to promote the professional development and advancement of women crime writers to achieve equality in the industry."*

*Our vision is: "Raising professionalism and achieving equity among crime writers."*

*And our motto is: "SinC into a good mystery!"*

Check Out the Croak & Dagger Website ([www.croak-and-dagger.com](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com)) for all your Croak & Dagger information needs:

- Upcoming Programs
- 2011 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
- The Nooseletter Archive

AND: All members are invited to join the Croak & Dagger Yahoo group, an online gathering place for mystery writers. Join in! Log on to C&D's web page ([www.croak-and-dagger.com](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com)) and click on the link to moderator Nancy Varian for instructions. Exchange news and information about mystery books, movies, etc., as well as online courses.

### **The Line Up**

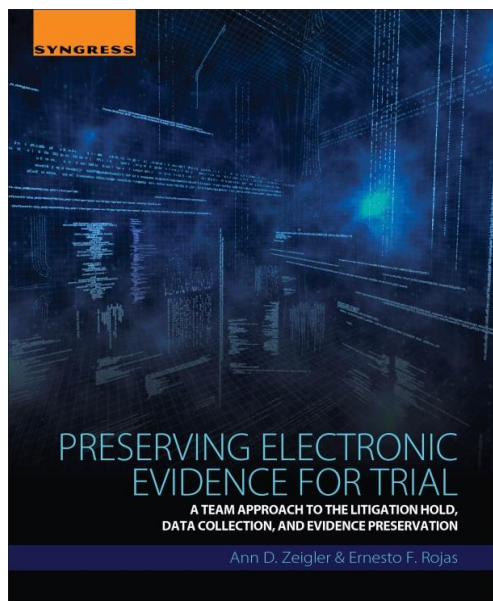
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Increase your word power. Words are the raw material of our craft. The greater your vocabulary the more effective your writing. We who write in English are fortunate to have the richest and most versatile language in the world. Respect it.  
—advice from P.D. James

## Noose News

### *New Book from Ann Ziegler*

C&D vice president Ann Ziegler sends the final version of the cover for her new book (release date 2/29/16), *Preserving Electronic Evidence for Trial*. “In spite of the pompous title (chosen by Elsevier, not me!), it's about people who think they can destroy evidence on computers and other electronic devices, and what happens to them when a judge finds out, courtesy of The Team.”



### *2016 Al Blanchard Award Contest*

Sponsored by the New England Crime Bake Committee, the Al Blanchard short story contest is open for submissions.

The prize consists of a \$100 in cash, publication in *Windward*, Level Best Books' 14th short crime fiction anthology, free admission to the Crime Bake Conference, and a handsome plaque. The winner is not required to attend the conference.

The story must be a crime story by a New England author or with a New England setting (for non-NE authors), previously unpublished (in print or electronically including author websites), no more than 5,000 words in length,

and may be in the mystery, thriller, suspense, caper, or horror (no torture/killing of children or animals) genres.

There is a limit of two stories per author, and the judges will consider previous submissions, provided they have not been published in the meantime and they have only been submitted ONCE before.

There is no entry fee for the contest, which has a deadline of midnight, April 30, 2016. For instructions on how to submit, visit <http://crimebake.org/al-blanchard-award/>

### *Sisters in Crime to receive a Raven Award*

The Raven Award from Mystery Writers of America recognizes outstanding achievement in the mystery field outside the realm of creative writing and will be presented to Sisters in Crime at the April 2016 Edgar Awards Banquet in New York City.

“Sisters in Crime is thrilled with this award, honoring nearly thirty years of work in the trenches, promoting the advancement, recognition, and professional development of women crime writers,” says SinC president Leslie Budewitz.

### *Motion on Signing Announcements*

To avoid flooding our members with too many emails, the following motion was proposed at the September 2015 board meeting:

Book signing announcements for Croak & Dagger members or other mystery writers can be included in the *Nooseletter*, if we know about them far enough in advance to include them (Refer to the last page of every issue for submission details, including deadlines—Ed.) Others will be sent out only with the meeting announcement, about the third week of each month. We will no longer try to send out such announcements whenever we hear about events.

Individual members can still let other members know about such events when they learn of them, but Croak and Dagger can no longer be responsible for such announcements.

## ***Mystery Writers of America Announces 2016 Edgar® Nominees***

On the 207th anniversary of the birth of Edgar Allan Poe, Mystery Writers of America (MWA) announce the nominees for “the Edgars,” honoring the best in mystery fiction, nonfiction, and television published or produced in 2015. The awards will be presented to the winners at MWA's 70th Annual Gala Banquet, at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York City on April 28, 2016.

The nominees:

### **BEST NOVEL**

***The Strangler Vine*** by M.J. Carter (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam's Sons)  
***The Lady From Zagreb*** by Philip Kerr (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam's Sons)  
***Life or Death*** by Michael Robotham (Hachette Book Group – Mulholland Books)  
***Let Me Die in His Footsteps*** by Lori Roy (Penguin Random House - Dutton)  
***Canary*** by Duane Swierczynski (Hachette Book Group – Mulholland Books)  
***Night Life*** by David C. Taylor (Forge Books)

### **BEST FIRST NOVEL BY AN AMERICAN AUTHOR**



***Past Crimes*** by Glen Erik Hamilton (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)  
***Where All Light Tends to Go*** by David Joy (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam's Sons)  
***Luckiest Girl Alive*** by Jessica Knoll (Simon & Schuster)  
***The Sympathizer*** by Viet Thanh Nguyen (Grove Atlantic – Grove Press)  
***Unbecoming*** by Rebecca Scherm (Penguin Random House - Viking)

### **BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL**

***The Long and Faraway Gone*** by Lou Berney (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)  
***The Necessary Death of Lewis Winter*** by Malcolm Mackay (Hachette Book Group – Mulholland Books)  
***What She Knew*** by Gilly Macmillan (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)  
***Woman with a Blue Pencil*** by Gordon McAlpine (Prometheus Books – Seventh Street Books)  
***Gun Street Girl*** by Adrian McKinty (Prometheus Books – Seventh Street Books)  
***The Daughter*** by Jane Shemilt (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)

### **BEST FACT CRIME**

***Operation Nemesis: The Assassination Plot that Avenged the American Genocide*** by Eric Bogosian (Hachette Book Group – Little, Brown and Company)  
***Where The Bodies Were Buried: Whitey Bulger and the World That Made Him*** by T.J. English (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)  
***Whipping Boy: The Forty-Year Search for My Twelve-Year-Old Bully*** by Allen Kurzweil (HarperCollins Publishers - Harper)  
***Forensics: What Bugs, Burns, Prints, DNA and More Tell Us About Crime*** by Val McDermid (Grove Atlantic – Grove Press)  
***American Pain: How a Young Felon and his Ring of Doctors Unleashed America's Deadliest Drug Epidemic*** by John Temple (Rowman & Littlefield – Lyons Press)

## BEST CRITICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL

***The Golden Age of Murder*** by Martin Edwards (HarperCollins Publishers - HarperCollins)

***The Outsider: My Life in Intrigue*** by Frederick Forsyth (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam's Sons)

***Meanwhile There Are Letters: The Correspondence of Eudora Welty and Ross Macdonald*** by Suzanne Marrs and Tom Nolan (Arcade Publishing)

***Goldeneye: Where Bond Was Born: Ian Fleming's Jamaica*** by Matthew Parker (Pegasus Books)\*

***The Lost Detective: Becoming Dashiell Hammett*** by Nathan Ward (Bloomsbury Publishing – Bloomsbury USA)

\*Reviewed in the January Nooseletter – Ed.

## BEST SHORT STORY

**"The Little Men"** by Megan Abbott (Mysterious Bookshop)

**"On Borrowed Time"** by Mat Coward (EQMM)

**"The Saturday Night Before Easter Sunday"** by Peter Farrelly in *Providence Noir* (Akashic Books)

**"Family Treasures"** by Shirley Jackson in *Let Me Tell You* (Random House)

**"Obits"** by Stephen King in *Bazaar of Bad Dreams* (Simon & Schuster - Scribner)

**"Every Seven Years"** by Denise Mina (Mysterious Bookshop)

## BEST JUVENILE

***Catch You Later, Traitor*** by Avi (Algonquin Young Readers - Workman)

***If You Find This*** by Matthew Baker (Hachette Book Group – Little, Brown Books for Young Readers)

***Curiosity House: The Shrunk Head*** by Lauren Oliver & H.C.Chester (HarperCollins Publishers – HarperCollins Children's Books)

***Blackthorn Key*** by Kevin Sands (Simon & Schuster - Aladdin)

***Footer Davis Probably is Crazy*** by Susan Vaught (Simon & Schuster – Paula Wiseman Books)

## BEST YOUNG ADULT

***Endangered*** by Lamar Giles (HarperCollins Children's Books - HarperTeen)

***A Madness So Discreet*** by Mindy McGinnis (HarperCollins Publishers – Katherine Tegen Books)

***The Sin Eater's Daughter*** by Melinda Salisbury (Scholastic – Scholastic Press)

***The Walls Around Us*** by Nova Ren Suma (Algonquin Young Readers - Workman)

***Ask the Dark*** by Henry Turner (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – Clarion Books)

## BEST TELEVISION EPISODE TELEPLAY

**"Episode 7," - *Broadchurch***, Teleplay by Chris Chibnall (BBC America)

**"Gently with the Women" - *George Gently***, Teleplay by Peter Flannery (Acorn TV)

**"Elise - The Final Mystery" - *Foyle's War***, Teleplay by Anthony Horowitz (Acorn TV)

**"Terra Incognita" - *Person of Interest***, Teleplay by Erik Mountain & Melissa Scrivner Love (CBS/Warner Brothers)

**"The Beating of her Wings" - *Ripper Street***, Teleplay by Richard Warlow (BBC America)

## THE SIMON & SCHUSTER - MARY HIGGINS CLARK AWARD

***A Woman Unknown*** by Frances Brody (Minotaur Books – A Thomas Dunne Book)  
***The Masque of a Murderer*** by Suzanne Calkins (Minotaur Books)  
***Night Night, Sleep Tight*** by Hallie Ephron (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow)  
***The Child Garden*** by Catriona McPherson (Llewellyn Worldwide – Midnight Ink)  
***Little Pretty Things*** by Lori Rader-Day (Prometheus Books – Seventh Street Books)

## ROBERT L. FISH MEMORIAL AWARD

**"Chung Ling Soo's Greatest Trick" – *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*** by Russell W. Johnson (Dell Magazines).



## ***And...The 2016 Agatha Nominees Are...***

The Agatha Awards honor the “traditional” mystery—that is, books best typified by the works of Agatha Christie. The genre is loosely defined as mysteries that contain no explicit sex, excessive gore, or gratuitous violence. Winners will be announced at the Awards banquet to be held on Saturday, April 30, 2016, during Malice Domestic 28.

The nominees:

### BEST CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

***Burned Bridges*** by Annette Dashofy (Henery Press)  
***Long Upon the Land*** by Margaret Maron (Grand Central Publishing)  
***The Child Garden*** by Catriona McPherson (Midnight Ink)  
***Nature of the Beast*** by Louise Penny (Minotaur Books)  
***What You See*** by Hank Phillippi Ryan (Forge Books)

### BEST HISTORICAL NOVEL

***Malice at the Palace*** by Rhys Bowen (Berkley)  
***The Masque of a Murderer*** by Susanna Calkins (Minotaur Books)  
***Dreaming Spies*** by Laurie R. King (Bantam)  
***Mrs. Roosevelt's Confidante*** by Susan Elia MacNeal (Bantam)  
***Murder on Amsterdam Avenue*** by Victoria Thompson (Berkley)



## BEST FIRST NOVEL

***Death of a Dishonorable Gentleman*** by Tessa Arlen (Minotaur Books)

***Macdeath*** by Cindy Brown (Henery Press)

***Plantation Shudders*** by Ellen Byron (Crooked Lane Books)

***Just Killing Time*** by Julianne Holmes (Berkley)

***On the Road with Del and Louise*** by Art Taylor (Henery Press)

## BEST NONFICTION

***The Great Detective: The Amazing Rise and Immortal Life of Sherlock Holmes*** by Zack Dundas (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

***The Golden Age of Murder: The Mystery of the Writers Who Invented the Modern Detective Story*** by Martin Edwards (HarperCollins)

***A is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie*** by Kathryn Harkup (Bloomsbury USA)

***Unsolved Murders and Disappearances in Northeast Ohio*** by Jane Ann Turzillo (Arcadia)

***The Mystery Writers of America Cookbook: Wickedly Good Meals and Desserts to Die For***, Kate White (Editor), Harlan Coben (Contributor) and Gillian Flynn (Contributor), (Quirk Books)

## BEST SHORT STORY

"A Year Without Santa Claus?" by Barb Goffman (AHMM)

"A Questionable Death" by Edith Maxwell in *History& Mystery, Oh My* (Mystery & Horror, LLC)

"A Killing at the Beausoleil" by Terri Farley Moran (EQMM)

"Suffer the Poor" by Harriette Sackler in *History& Mystery, Oh My* (Mystery & Horror, LLC)

"A Joy Forever" by BK Stevens (AHMM)

## BEST CHILDREN'S/YOUNG ADULT

***Pieces and Players*** by Blue Balliett (Scholastic Press)

***Need*** by Joelle Charbonneau (HMH Books for Young Readers)

***Andi Unstoppable*** by Amanda Flower (Zonderkidz)

***Woof*** by Spencer Quinn (Scholastic Press)

***Fighting Chance: A Martial Arts Mystery*** by B.K. Stevens (Poisoned Pen Press)



# ***Rejection Letters Deciphered:***



## ***5 Common Reasons Agents Give for Rejecting Novels (And What They Really Mean)***

by Susan Defreitas\*

By the time you submitted your novel to literary agents, you'd put it through a whole lot of revisions. You'd run it by trusted critique partners. And your query was good enough to get you the coveted partial-manuscript request—or the even more coveted full-manuscript request. So what's up with these rejection letters?

Like nearly everything associated with publishing, much of this is simply a numbers game—agents receive a huge number of queries every year, and they can only accept so many clients. Like nearly everything associated with publishing, it is also a matter of taste. It's not uncommon for one agent to say the plot was great but the writing sucked, and another to say the exact opposite.

Still, having served as a “book doctor” for many clients in this position, there are certain words and phrases I've come to consider red flags for certain issues in novels.

### **1) “The first chapter just didn't grab me.”**

I've seen this phrase used to reject novels that contain a lot of information up front, which some call an info dump. But I've also seen it applied to novels that simply introduce a lot of characters right away, making it difficult to keep track of who will or won't be important. This phrase is also common in novels that open slowly, with no real “house on fire” moment.

Maybe you've written a medical thriller with a lot of science involved (or) a political novel with a lot of background necessary to the plot. Maybe you've written a novel with a cast of thousands.

Whatever it is, it sounds like you're going to have to increase the ratio of signal to noise in your opening—and, if possible, increase the heat.

### **2) “The pacing feels off/too slow.”**

If an agent tells you the pacing feels slow, chances are good that you've either got some sections where nothing much seems to happen or you're not hitting regular beats with your plot points.

That phrase about the pacing being “off” can be harder to diagnose. Maybe the plot isn't clear enough to drive the story. Maybe there are developments that occur so quickly that it's hard to make sense of them, which is sometimes a consequence of not giving your characters a chance to process what those developments might mean.

But this can also be sort of an unconscious code for “some of these developments seem inadequately set up” (I say unconscious because in many cases, agents aren't aware of the cause of a narrative problem, just the effect). Because when a character goes through a shift too suddenly for that development to seem believable, or a plot development seems to come out of nowhere, it's often a consequence of not being set up earlier on in the story. One of the critical functions of foreshadowing is that it gives the events of the plot a sense of inevitability, so they never seem to come out of the blue.

### **3) “I'm just not in love with this story/protagonist.”**

This is, perhaps the most maddening of all rejections. You're in love with your story and its protagonist (why else would you persist in this madness?). So why isn't the agent?

Beware that this is sometimes just the “let them down easy,” all-purpose rejection (more on this below) when agents don't exactly know what's not working for them. But it's also possible that your novel has some issues with POV.



I've seen this phrase used as grounds for rejection for novels with compelling stories that feel as if they're being told from a distance. If this is the case with your novel, this might be because you're telling it from third person, when first person might better serve the story. It might be because you haven't gone close enough with that third person for us to really feel what the character is going through. Or it might be that you're not sticking close enough in time to the major events of the plot for us to feel a sense of urgency and identification with the protagonist.

But it might also be possible that you've chosen the wrong POV character. If your commitment is really to the story itself, consider: Have you chosen the POV character with the most interesting angle of access on this story? The one with the most at stake?

#### 4) "I didn't find the authorial voice sufficiently memorable or arresting."

Ouch! This one can be hard not to interpret as "I just don't find *you* that compelling as a person." After all, what is voice if not your unique stamp, your specific fingerprint, your writer's DNA?

Well, that's just it, exactly—this one actually is kind of personal. As in, it's a matter of taste. Unlike a cluttered first chapter, a slow plot, or a distanced POV. Which means that if you get this phrase from one agent, another agent is just as likely to dig that specific sort of thing you've got going on.

If you get this from more than one agent, well, okay, maybe that's a thing. But as often as not, that same voice that puts one agent to sleep will get another onboard.

#### 5) "This book isn't right for me."

If you did your homework in selecting an agent, this suggests that perhaps your work may not fit into the box that you think it does. Or perhaps you didn't dig deep enough with your homework; maybe the agent you contacted only handles a small subset of the genre you're working in, and, on further analysis, your novel does not fit the bill.

But just as likely, it means nothing at all. Or, more specifically, things that the agent really can't tell you. Such as: Stuff like this is mad hard to sell right now. Or: I've already got something like this that I'm trying to pitch. Or even, you used the phrase *sickening crunch*, which I simply cannot abide.

This phrase is pretty much the equivalent of "I don't think this is going to work out" in dating—a sort of stock phrase that can mean anything at all. So don't read too much into it. Just keep swinging.

\*Excerpted from <https://litreactor.com/columns/rejection-letters-deciphered>, 11/12/15



Sisters in Crime

## Guppies

SinC guppies come from across the United States and Canada. They have different occupations and avocations, but they share a passion for writing mysteries and a common goal of getting published.

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

Guppies is an online writer's support group. Subgroups represent cozies, noir, psychological and romantic suspense, and thrillers. The Mystery Analysis Group is a book discussion group aimed at discussing the craft, and the AgentQuest group can help with writing queries and synopses.

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

# Reviews

## Rob's Random Shots

### March Case File Number 1

*The Secret Adversary* by Agatha Christie. 1922, Penguin Press reissue, 2012 (TP)

This is the first volume in the six-book series of the Tommy and Tuppence Beresford "Partners in Crime" mystery series, and was written by Christie on the heels of her first mystery, the Poirot novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Coincidentally, the last of the six books in this series, *The Postern of Fate*, published in 1973, just before her death, was her final work.

As a curiosity, this book reads more like a 19<sup>th</sup> century novel than a 20<sup>th</sup> century one. Christie was still learning her craft, not yet settled in her genre, and hadn't yet started her Miss Marple series or her 27 non-series novels and plays. Readers familiar with the *Thin Man* series of movies will not find the sparkling repartee between the protagonists, Nick and Nora Charles, that Dashiell Hammett did so well (in fact most of that repartee came from the screenwriters of the movie versions). In this novel, Tommy and Tuppence (two cents in British vernacular) spend most of the book apart, each menaced by the same gang of spies, out to locate a missing draft treaty from 1915 that might lead to a socialist uprising in Britain.

Coming as it did on the heels of *Styles*, this book was also snatched up by readers eager for high quality British mysteries, like those of the late Conan Doyle. While Christie's books are exemplars of the between-the-wars school of cozy mysteries, the Partners in Crime series would gradually mature as the protagonists married, had children, and then grandchildren.

This first book owes much to its era, beginning with the sinking of the Lusitania during World War I and continuing through the age of television, moonwalking, and the rise (but not yet demise) of Communist Russia and the eventual winding down of the Cold War. The spies in this book are ruthless Russians, who menace the protagonists separately and readers are kept in the dark. Modern authors (myself included) who use more than one protagonist usually alternate chapters between their characters' points of view. Christie would eventually adopt this method as well.

This is fun quick read and will have readers guessing the identity of the title character somewhat before the big reveal. But I guessed wrong. So may you. The most modern technology brought up several times in this novel is eavesdropping by the latest advance in technology, the Dictaphone. My dad was still using a Dictaphone in the 1960s.

Technology may change, but the works of Agatha Christie keep finding new generations of readers and filmmakers.

—Rob Kresge ([rkresge777@comcast.net](mailto:rkresge777@comcast.net))

### March Case File Number 2

*Halloween Party* by Agatha Christie. William Morrow 2011, 272 pp (TP)

As witness to the much improved skills of Christie over time, I present this excellent example of her mastery of plot, dialogue, and characterization in this, one of her last few Poirot cases. Readers of the *Nooseletter* may recall how I dissed the work of Sophie Hannah, hired by the Christie estate to write new ones. Some readers may have read continuations of the Dorothy L. Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey series. This late Poirot work is an excellent example why readers ought to finish the entire original series before comparing the works of modern ghost writers.

On the face of it, this book seems a departure for Christie and Poirot. In the early chapters, an 11-year-old girl is found forcibly drowned in a small tub after a party in which children bobbed for apples. Poirot is not present, but is called to the idyllic suburban town by his mystery author friend Ariadne Oliver (a stand-in for Christie herself?). Christie did not often use a child's murder, but this is an excellent example of her later works in which Poirot is often called into an unfamiliar environment and turns over metaphorical rocks to try to find whether some past event led to this crime.

That leads to a lot of interviews with adults in the community, and a lot of unpleasant history and another murder are dredged up. Suffice it to say, readers are given the "play-fair" clue necessary to solving the crime even before Poirot appears. And once he deduces from that the identity of the murderer, it only remains for him to tie motive to the crime to arrive at a solution. I didn't appreciate the importance of that early clue until Poirot did, and I'll bet you won't either. ♦

—Rob Kresge ([rkresge777@comcast.net](mailto:rkresge777@comcast.net))

### March Case File Number 3

***The Crossing*** by Michael Connelly. Little, Brown 2015, 401 pp (HC)

Remember my well-used phrase, “Michael Connelly never disappoints?” Well, aside from his weakest work, the stand-alone *Chasing the Dime*, that remains true through his long list of bestsellers. Readers (and viewers of the Bosch Amazon series and the wonderful *Lincoln Lawyer* movie with Michael McConaughey) will delight in this tale.

Like many of Connelly’s works, the title has more than one meaning: 1. “Crossing” in police detective parlance means at some point the killer and the victim crossed paths. If you can find that crossing, you may be able to solve the case. 2. In this novel, Bosch has retired from the LAPD and is approached by his half-brother, lawyer Mickey Haller, to investigate a case for him that involves a client charged with murder. In this context, “crossing” is a disparaging, disdainful term used by cops to describe one of their own who goes to work for the defense side of trials. Bosch spends much of the novel trying to hide his “crossing,” then fending off the insults of former colleagues.

Not only do many favorite characters return from earlier Bosch novels, his former partners and his daughter Maddie, but Connelly slyly has Haller mention that Hollywood made a *Lincoln Lawyer* movie about him and Bosch wonders whether a sequel might be arrived at.

Bosch searches for evidence that Haller’s client may not be the killer and grudgingly comes to the conclusion that he has in fact been framed for the crime. There is an agonizingly suspenseful set of concluding chapters as Bosch races to pin down the last defense witness before the killer can eliminate him and incriminating evidence.

Long live Harry Bosch! Read this book; see the movie and Amazon TV series. ♦

—Rob Kresge ([rkresge777@comcast.net](mailto:rkresge777@comcast.net))

### March Case File Number 4

***You Can’t Escape*** by Nancy Bush. Penguin, 2015 (Read in the Kindle edition).

After having enjoyed Michael Connelly’s latest, it grieves me to have to report that the latest Nancy Bush Rafferty family detective novel (to which I gave glowing reviews of the first three in the last two *Nooseletters*), is more than a let-down. It’s a fraud perpetrated on her fans and Amazon reviews

reflect her readers’ bitter disappointment; some go so far as to label it a fraud.

I generally do not publish reviews of books I don’t like, but this one really got my goat: Bush took another finished novel, which did not include the Rafferty family of police detectives. She must have written this novel earlier and wrote in a one-page Raffertys walk-on that had nothing to do with the bombing that occurs early in this book or the small-town serial killings that populate this novel. I found this sham particularly galling, since I was so full of praise for her innovative series in which the second and third Rafferty books begin with minutes or hours of the previous work.

If I find any subsequent novels labeled as “Rafferty family series” after this *faux* “Book Four,” I will investigate carefully to see if reviews bear this out. Other readers, now forewarned, should do the same. ♦

—Rob Kresge ([rkresge777@comcast.net](mailto:rkresge777@comcast.net))

### March Case File Number 5

***When Good Men Die*** by Steven W. Horn. Granite Peak Press, 2015, 427 pp (TP)

Fair warning: This is a review of a novel by a good friend of mine. *When Good Men Die* is a sequel to the award-winning first Sam Dawson mystery, *The Pumpkin Eater*, which I also reviewed for the *Nooseletter*. I urge readers to find copies of his first book, the chilling “return from Vietnam” novel, *Another Man’s Life*, the best thing ever written in that sub-genre (including nonfiction), which I also reviewed.

This book is set in 2007 Minnesota. Sam Dawson has given up his Colorado state government job, bought an RV and a bloodhound named L2, and now roams the upper Midwest as a freelance photographer, primarily of headstones in old graveyards. He happens onto a senior life care facility in Minnesota.

But before we even get to that year of the present, the book opens with a travelling carnival show in the Minnesota of 1933. Horn expertly weaves chapters of the past, mainly from the point of view of wrestler and strongman Hans Gottlieb, who fights under the name Trapper at that point.

Horn expertly takes readers on a journey that presents us with small-town traveling circus performers during the Depression and after, and life in a small Minnesota hospice, where first one, then another suspicious death occurs. Nursing home staff are at a loss to explain the deaths, but one of the

deceased turns out to be the long-retired former strongman. In order to paint a picture of the victim's life and why he may have been murdered rather than dying of natural causes, Horn gives us glimpses of Hans in high school, during his travelling carny days, even a turn as an Olympic wrestler, and as a professional in the early days of that sport.

Sam is intrigued with why someone may have wanted to murder such an old man, who does turn out to have had a fortune squirreled away in long-term investments. Horn is a master of misdirection (the skill of professional magicians). I didn't guess the killer at all and you probably won't, either. Likewise, I didn't even notice the skillfully managed disappearance of a central character for several chapters in the last quarter of this book that enables the solution of the crimes.

As this book and *The Pumpkin Eater* show, Steve Horn is a master of modern mysteries whose motives are set in the past. Given my interest in history, I look forward to more works by this author and hope you get to know him, too.♦

—Rob Kresge ([rkresge777@comcast.net](mailto:rkresge777@comcast.net))

### March Case File Number 5

***House of Rain*** by Craig Childs. Hachette Books, 2006, 400 pp (TP)

This is a complete departure for me, the first time I will have reviewed a nonfiction mystery for this or any publication. Childs is a naturalist and frequent contributor to National Public Radio and what he has undertaken in this detail-packed volume is his years-long personal effort to answer the most intriguing mystery of the Southwest: What really happened to the Anasazi, who built a civilization in New Mexico's Chaco Canyon in the 1200s and disappeared/walked away from it?

Most of Childs' explorations were solo trips on foot through the Four Corners (and later Mexican) wilderness over a decade and more. But he often took joint journeys with well-known archeologists and park rangers and even shared some difficult and dangerous hikes in broiling summers and snowy winters with his wife and their then-infant son.

Childs immersed himself in the few clues that the Chaco people left behind—their architecture, “town” planning, pottery, and artifacts like turkey feather robes and woven sandals. His searches took years and repeat visits to some sites.

Basically his journeys came to resemble what he deduced the Anasazi must have done, if sometimes not in person then in the influence their

culture had on other Southwest Indians: Leave their settled world in search of water or to escape enemies. He believes he paralleled their journeys and laid out his book to reflect that epic generations/centuries-long migration counterclockwise from Chaco to northwestern New Mexico (Aztec and other ruins), southwest Colorado (Mesa Verde and other sites), southeastern Utah, northeastern Arizona, south central Arizona, southern Arizona, and then into northern Mexico, all in the centuries from 1200 to the early 1500s, before white explorers ever entered those places.

Childs is careful to footnote discoveries or opinions that conflict with some of his findings, but he also occasionally travels with professionals, experts on the cultures of the region, who often buoy up his opinions or cause him to modify his hypotheses. If you enjoy a good true-life mystery, I think you'd like this volume. Certainly Craig makes an affable guide to sites I've visited and some I haven't. He makes me want to visit or revisit all of them. ♦

—Rob Kresge ([rkresge777@comcast.net](mailto:rkresge777@comcast.net))

### Key:

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

***Odin's Child*** by Bruce Macbain, Blank Slate Press 2015, 396 pages (PB)

Author Macbain cites his medieval sources: “Violence is pervasive in the sagas. They exult in swirling battle scenes where arms, legs, heads are lopped off with a single slash of the blade. I have, if anything, toned things down a bit.”

The year is A.D. 1029; the place, Iceland. Sixteen-year-old Odd Thorvaldsson—nicknamed “Tangle Hair”—and his family travel to participate in stallion fighting competitions. In the past, a winning stallion was sacrificed to a pagan god, but “Christmen” priests now forbid the practice; Scandinavian Christianity has a foothold among the ancient Icelandic gods and superstitions.

The stallion event ends in brawl with Hrut, a neighbor, suspected of raping a family member. When Odd and his brother, Gunnar, confront him, two deaths result, which must be judged as murders or rightful feud killings at the summer *Althing*, an assembly that adjudicates grievances.

At the trial, hope for exoneration is shattered when lying witnesses, a bribed lawyer and his supporting witness defect to Hrut. Accused of murder, Odd and Gunnar are sentenced to life-long exile; otherwise the penalty is forfeiture of the family land. Dispirited, both return home, where Odd places himself under the protection his pagan god, Odin, not Christ.

The exile will be in two weeks. When Hrut arrives early to acquire his farmstead, a fight breaks out; Gunnar is killed and the house burned. A wounded Odd escapes and is nursed by his friend Kalf and an uncle. Stig, a cunning adventurer, recruits a crew to steal Hrut's trading ship, then sail toward Scandinavia to sell its cargo.

Macbain's saga takes us to dwarf-sized Laplanders, with their mysterious Ancient, a wizard that commands the spirits of their world. Sailing south to Norway, the crew puts in at a port where Christian King Olaf enlists followers to counter pagan opponents and consolidate power. The author admits to a bit of tampering with the historic Battle of Striklestad, but vividly describes the bloody action and aftermath.

Winter passes with Odd restless. In spring he bargains for a new ship, the Sea Viper. Sailing around Norway and Sweden into the Baltic Sea, the crew arrives at the country of Finns. Odd and his men are captured and witness a surrealistic horror—a plaza of severed heads rotting on stakes.

Odd eventually escapes to a friendly Finn village ruled by Harald, half-brother of King Olaf, who takes a liking to Odd and invites him to be his *skald*—companion—on a journey to Novgorod.

*The Ice Queen* continues this fine trilogy. ♦

—Albert Noyer ([anoyer@msn.com](mailto:anoyer@msn.com))

### Series mysteries:

#### All reviews by Susan Zates

**NOTE:** Print publisher noted; most also available (and/or read by the reviewer) in e-format.

*The Angel of Darkness* by Caleb Carr, Ballantine Books, 2010, 770 pages (PB)

This sequel to *The Alienist* is a historical mystery set in 1897 New York. Familiar characters return: alienist Dr. Laszlo Kreizler, newspaperman John Moore Schuyler, police detectives Marcus and Lucius Isaacson, independent-minded Sara Howard,

former street urchin Stevie Taggart, manservant Cyrus Montrose, and Theodore Roosevelt.

It's been twenty years since they became trusted friends, as they pooled their talents in the hunt for a serial killer. Stevie looks back in time to 1897, as he narrates another of their challenging and harrowing cases.

Dr. Kreizler is a pioneer in forensic psychiatry, whose specialty is treating mentally disturbed and abused children. When a child in his clinic commits suicide, the clinic is shut down by the NYPD, who don't have faith in Dr. Kreizler's modern-thinking approaches. Kreizler is shattered emotionally, frantic about the future of the clinic children.

To distract him with a mystery, his cohorts John Moore and Sara Howard enlist his help recovering a kidnapped baby. The kidnapper leads them on a long, painful chase in the slums of New York City and upstate to Saratoga. They trace her life, multiple identities, and the trail of deaths in her wake. Kreizler diagnoses a dual personality: caregiver vs. destroyer. Many times, just as they think they've caught her, she cleverly eludes them by violence and/or trickery.

It's a book to savor: narrated in Stevie's vernacular, rich in period detail, a long struggle for justice. ♦

*Town in a Blueberry Jam* by B.B. Haywood. Berkley, 2009, 321 pp (PB)

(Book 1 in a new cozy mystery series set in a contemporary coastal village in Maine.)

Candy Holliday lives with her father on his blueberry farm, which he purchased at retirement. Candy delights in the hard, simple work and the easily visible results.

Cape Wilmington holds an annual blueberry festival, complete with parade, booths and beauty contest. Candy volunteered to provide blueberry pies and work a booth. The town is shocked at the sudden death of a resident celebrity, followed not long after by the murder of a festival organizer.

When a simple-minded, peaceful handyman is arrested for the crime on circumstantial evidence, Candy is compelled to investigate on her own, to find the real killer. In her quest for justice, she uncovers many secrets that town residents might kill again to keep buried.

Includes recipes like Candy Holliday's Blueberry Whipped Cream, Herr Georg's Bavarian Blueberry Pretzels, and Blueberry Gingerbread. ♦



***Death Wears a Red Hat*** by R.J. Rubadeau.  
Andrews McMeel LLC, 2012, 288 pp (HC)

(The second book in the Father Koesler mystery series set in Detroit near the end of the 1900s.)

A serial murderer places his victims' heads in symbolic locations within Detroit churches. The first round of murder victims are the city's most infamous criminals; the second round are small-time criminals by comparison (but evil all the same).

Father Koesler shares his ecclesiastical knowledge with the police to assist their investigation. Two reporters, working for rival local newspapers, compete to get 'the scoop' first.

Chapters alternate (in a rather choppy manner) between the police investigation, the reporters' efforts, and additional petty criminals and their crimes during the span of the investigation. ♦

***W is for Wasted*** by Sue Grafton. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2014, 448 pp (PB)

(The 23rd book of her Kinsey Millhone mystery series set in 1980s California.)

Fictional seaside "Santa Teresa" is easily recognizable as Santa Barbara. Kinsey is still 38, still on her own as a PI, still living in her nautical-style apartment at Henry's. Instead of her VW she's driving a Mustang, which she's thinking of selling (it's too conspicuous for a PI).

The story starts slowly, as Kinsey investigates a homeless man's death mostly because she doesn't have any other cases to work on. Quite a way into the book, wham! it suddenly becomes interesting (so hang in there if it bores you at first).

Parallel chapters are from another PI's point of view. He's a con artist, running up big bills to milk a

client on a routine cheating-spouse surveillance. But he discovers a much more exciting and dangerous trail to follow.

The link between the parallel plots is Robert Dietz, Kinsey's on-and-off-again boyfriend. This time he departs in order to cope with his responsibilities as a single father.

Kinsey reveals liberal political views when she cuts off conservative rants from a business owner she questions about the homeless. I wonder if the "Ode to the Homeless" that William spouts near the end is meant to express Kinsey's (and the author's) feelings, or just William's eccentricity?" ♦

***Death at Whitechapel*** by Robin Paige. Berkley 2000, 288 pp (PB)

(The 6th book of the Sir Charles Sheridan mystery series set in Victorian England.)

The series incorporates historical figures in fictional adventures. In this book it's the young Winston Churchill. His widowed mother is being blackmailed over an alleged scandal that would hurt her son's chances for career advancement. She asks Charles and Kathryn for help.

Investigating the blackmail requires them to question inhabitants of the poverty-stricken East End about events far in the past. They learn of a cover-up at the highest levels of government, that eventually leads them to solving the Jack the Ripper murders.

A wealth of period detail makes this series a treat to read. Both protagonists refuse to follow society's norms and lead the typical wealthy landowner's life. Kathryn is independent, writing books under a pseudonym; Charles is intelligent and inquisitive, pursuing advances in forensics. ♦

## Jake Page 1936-2016

Mystery writer Jake Page died February 10 at his home in Lyons, Colorado. He was 80.

A versatile journalist and author who published dozens of books, he was born in Boston, graduated from Princeton, and began his career as an editor at a New York publishing house. Beginning in the 1970s, Jake frequently visited the Southwest, often with his wife, photographer Susanne Anderson Page. They published several books together, including *In the Hands of the Great Spirit: The 20,000-Year History of American Indians*.

In the 1980s and 1990s, he published a well-received series of novels featuring detective Mo Bowdre, who solved art thefts and other crimes in the Southwest. The first in the series was *The Stolen Gods* and later included *The Lethal Partner*, *The Deadly Canyon*, and *A Certain Malice*.

As a freelance writer, his subjects included art patron Mabel Dodge Luhan and western novelist Zane Grey. All his stories were written in his characteristically graceful prose, explaining complex matters with humor and clarity.

*From the obituary by Matt Schudel in the Washington Post, 2/13/16*

## 2016 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, March 22, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, April 26, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, May 24, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, June 28, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, July 26, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, August 23, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, September 27, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, October 25, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, November 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 North Domingo Baca Multigenerational Center at 7521 Carmel Avenue NE, north of Paseo del Norte and west of Wyoming. Check our Web site, [www.croak-and-dagger.com](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com), for schedule changes and upcoming programs.

### Summary of Findings

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

### †Nooseletter Submissions†

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

**Length:** Articles should average 500 words, but short items and ideas for sources are also welcome.

**Deadlines:** Publication is every other month, starting in January. Submission deadlines are the last day of the month *prior* to publication: Feb 29, April 30, June 30, Aug 31, Oct 31, and Dec 31.

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

**Submissions:** Please submit via e-mail to [newsette@earthlink.net](mailto:newsette@earthlink.net), with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

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

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