



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
 ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume IX, Number 1 — January 2013

†Expert Testimony†

This is my first column as Croak and Dagger President. Welcome! I read mysteries. I mostly write research reports for groups such as the League of Women Voters. My latest effort, “It’s Not Just DWI: Reducing Death and Harm from Alcohol in New Mexico,” is in the final review and editing process. It will be discussed at League meetings all over the state this spring.

I am very interested in the future of my prime source of new mysteries – the library. The headline of a 12/27/12 New York Times article reads, “Libraries See Openings as Bookstores Close.” It seems many public libraries are trying to figure out their role and responsibilities in a digital age and are seeing an opportunity to fill the hole left by closing bookstores.

Libraries are stocking their collections with titles in demand, thinking of themselves almost as stores, according to Jason Kuhl, executive director of the Arlington Heights (IL) Memorial Library. One of his interesting ideas is turning part of the first floor of the library into a bookstore-like area with cozy seating, vending machines, and an abundance of best sellers.

Did you know that the downtown main library in Albuquerque has a coffee shop in the entrance foyer?

Many libraries, including those in Albuquerque, are turning themselves into vibrant community centers with classes and clubs on all kinds of subjects – stitching, Legos, chess, and book clubs. There are mystery book clubs at the Cherry Hills, Juan Tabo, and Tony Hillerman libraries that might be of interest to Croak & Dagger members.

Library branches host events on a regular basis such as story time, read to the dogs, and teen reading challenges. There are classes in how to use the computer and other electronic gadgets. There are public internet computers that can be used for searches and e-mail. They will teach you how to set up a g-mail account on one of their computers. They will also lend you e-books for your reader or iPad.

Cherry Hills, the branch we usually use, has a section of shelving near the checkout machines with staff picks of a wide range of interesting books you might not have thought of reading and a themed display of mystery books, which changes each month, and mystery booklists by theme – anthropological, culinary, and Scandinavian, for example. Many librarians are “hand selling” books in the best tradition of the great bookstores.

Libraries are a reader’s best friend!

– Jan Bray, President

Don’t Miss It!
Tuesday, January 22, at 7 p.m.

Our January speaker will be **Gail Rubin**, author of *A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don’t Plan to Die*.

Gail will talk about funerals as they might be portrayed in murder mysteries and will present her interactive game, “The Newly Dead Game.”


Gail has spoken at numerous venues around the Southwest, including the Frozen Dead Guys Festival in Colorado, and locally on such topics as “Laughing in the face of death” and “Everybody dies: Lessons from the *Six Feet Under* TV series.” Depend on her not to give a gloomy talk!

Our speaker at the February meeting will be **Chris Eboch**, author of mystery and adventure books, both fiction and nonfiction, for children and young adults. She also writes novels for adults under the name Kris Bock.

Chris's *Haunted* series, for ages 8-12, follows a brother and sister who travel with their parents' ghost hunter TV show. Her writing articles have appeared in *Writer's Digest*, *Children's Writer*, and *Byline*. "Everyone in my family enjoys writing," Chris says on her website (www.chriseboch.com). Also visit her on <http://chriseboch.blogspot.com/>.

"My home office window looks out at a small mountain. I often see birds and lizards in the yard, and I've even seen a fox passing through. Watching the scenery gives me a break from writing, so I feel recharged."

The Albuquerque Croak & Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime welcomes mystery fans, readers, and writers. Meetings are held in the police briefing room of the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Substation, 12700 Montgomery NE (1 block east of Tramway). Unless otherwise noted, programs are free and open to the public.



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

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

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

Check Out the Croak & Dagger Website for all your Croak & Dagger information needs.
www.croak-and-dagger.com

- Upcoming Programs
- 2013 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
- *The Nooseletter* Archive

AND: Remember that all members are invited to join the Croak & Dagger Yahoo group, an online gathering place for mystery writers. Join in! Log on to C&D's web page (www.croak-and-dagger.com) and click on the link for instructions. Exchange news and information about mystery books, movies, and TV shows, as well as online courses.

The Line Up

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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." (SinC Guppies)

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/.

Sherlock to CSI: Mystery writers seek science accuracy

Excerpted from an article by Jane O'Brien, BBC News, Washington, January 8, 2013

Crime novels can be easily undone by faulty facts. While writers try to get the science straight, a leading US scientific organisation is now offering a seal of approval to books that do it right.

When Sherlock Holmes told Watson it was elementary, it really was - by modern sleuthing standards.

Today's crime fiction and thriller writers, on the other hand, face a minefield of science and technology that is often essential to the plot—but hard to describe accurately.

Now, the Washington Academy of Sciences (WAS), established in 1898 by Alexander Graham Bell, has introduced a seal of approval for books with the scientific facts straight. Unlike most peer-review processes, this one is open to mystery writers.

“So much junk science is being published,” says Peg Kay, a writer and WAS member. She blames commercial pressures and a lack of good editors for the decline. “The editors now are just money men and they turn the editorial function over to an agent,” she says. “All the agent is really interested in is the mass market. Nobody knows what to believe because there's no filter.”

WAS President Jim Cole says many people encounter science through fiction and TV shows such as *CSI*, which can give the impression that technology can solve any crime.

“Science as it's generally perceived by the public is not necessarily correct science,” he says. “With self-publishing on the internet, I think this is going to be a huge issue in the future—about what's real and what's not real.”

Most successful authors realise the importance of thorough research. They also write about what they know—or quickly make contact with people who can offer expertise.

“I worry constantly about getting it wrong,” says New York Times bestselling author John Gilstrap. “The more detailed one gets into the technical issues, the riskier it all becomes. A small phrase you get wrong and it's astonishing how many emails you get, with blistering speed, telling you how you got it wrong.”

Gilstrap has written 11 thrillers, some featuring Jonathan Grave, a freelance hostage rescue specialist who bypasses the legal constraints hindering official efforts to reunite victims with their families. While Sherlock Holmes followed footprints, Jonathan Grave uses mobile phone technology, GPS, and the digital trails left by credit cards to track his targets.



“I’m not a very technical guy,” says Gilstrap. “The challenge for me was to sell Jonathan’s knowledge of technology while not understanding a lot of it myself. The research I do is just enough to sell the notion that he can do what he does. I don’t need to know how to do it myself.”

That approach has been so successful that he has even fooled a military special operations source who mistakenly believed Gilstrap had divulged classified technical information in one of his novels.

“I made it up—I didn’t reveal anything,” says Gilstrap. “But the reality is, if there is a way to track somebody or kill somebody more efficiently, there is a top secret CIA development contract to get it done. It just turns out I hit this one on the head.”

Most readers are familiar with the technology described in Gilstrap’s books. But it is still fairly new as a plot device, says Kathy Harig, owner of Mystery Loves Company bookstore in Maryland. She says the discovery of DNA was the first big scientific breakthrough that altered the way contemporary crime novels were structured. The most recent are the secret technologies employed in the international fight against terrorism.

“If you’ve got terrorism involved, then you have to know about the whole military aspect,” she says. “Drones, serial bombers, explosives, seeing things from a satellite.”

Alexandra Hamlet, who won awards for her first novel, a Cold War thriller called *The Right Guard*, says terrorism has created a new fiction genre - and describes her own work as “intellectual suspense.” She also draws extensively on her scientific background as an anthropologist and her work with US military intelligence.

That sort of background is increasingly essential to writing about contemporary events, Ms Harig says. “No matter how timely it is—it had still better be right.”

Diane Davidson writes with her sister about the information technology industry in which they both worked. The heroine of their latest book, *Outsourcing Murder*, is a 20-something IT consultant. The Davidson sisters are currently developing a plot around the supposition that medical implants could be vulnerable to computer hacking.

“That’s a prime example of a way to murder somebody,” Diane Davidson says. “We’re constructing a short story around that that is plausible but hopefully won’t be a how-to manual for how to kill someone.”

Scientists often disagree over real science. What happens when they cannot agree about the science and technology they read in fiction?

Ms Kay of WAS says the academy has been asked to approve a memoir by a well-known and highly respected neuroscientist.

“He practically invented neuroscience,” she says. “We’re not quite sure what to do about this, because if a reviewer comes back and says that on page 356 there’s a mistake in the science, and he says no there isn’t... what do we do?”

Four seals of approval have been conferred since the group began offering the award in June. A fifth manuscript is currently under review.

And as the seal becomes more established, WAS members hope other writers will submit their work for scrutiny.

Whatever the obstacles and regardless of the science, new plots and twists continue to emerge. And as Sherlock Holmes might have said: “Come Watson come - the game is afoot.”

Books that have earned the WAS seal

- *Me Tarzan You Dead*, by Peg Kay, Oct 2012
- *The Form Within*, by Karl Pribram, Nov 2012 (to be published January 2013)
- *The Hidden Giants*, by Sethanne Howard, Dec 2012

A Simple Way to Create Suspense

Excerpted from an article by Lee Child, on *Opinionator*, December 8, 2012

How do you create suspense? I'm asked that question often, and it seems that every writers' symposium has a class with that title. It's an important technical issue, and not just for so-called suspense novels. Every novel needs a narrative engine, a reason for people to keep reading to the end, whatever the subject, style, genre or approach.

But it's a bad question. Its very form misleads writers and pushes them onto an unhelpful and overcomplicated track.

Because "How do you create suspense?" has the same interrogatory shape as "How do you bake a cake?" And we all know—in theory or practice—how to bake a cake. We need ingredients, and we infer that the better quality those ingredients are, the better quality the cake will be. We know that we have to mix and stir those ingredients, and we're led to believe that the more thoroughly and conscientiously we combine them, the better the cake will taste.

So writers are taught to focus on ingredients and their combination. They're told they should create attractive, sympathetic characters, so that readers will care about them deeply, and then to plunge those characters into situations of continuing peril, the descent into which is the mixing and stirring, and the duration and horrors of which are the timing and temperature.

But it's really much simpler than that. "How do you bake a cake?" has the wrong structure. It's too indirect. The right structure and the right question is: "How do you make your family hungry?"

And the answer is: You make them wait four hours for dinner.

As novelists, we should ask or imply a question at the beginning of the story, and then we should delay the answer. (Which is what I did here, and you're still reading, right?) Readers are human, and humans seem programmed to wait for answers to questions they witness being asked.

I learned that fact in my first job, working in television production from 1977 until 1995. For instance, heading toward a movie review program, I remember we asked: Who was the studio's first choice for the Harry Callahan role in *Dirty Harry*? We knew most viewers would be intrigued. (What, Clint Eastwood wasn't the first choice?) But—and this was the lesson—the success of the tactic didn't depend on intrigue. Even viewers with no interest at all stuck around to find out. Humans are hard-wired. They need to know. Even viewers who knew the answer for sure stuck around, in order to be gratified. The gap was bridged, and the danger averted. (It was Frank Sinatra. You waited, right?)

We need to bring the same simple principle to our books. Page to page, paragraph to paragraph, line to line—even within single sentences—imply a question first, and then answer it second. Someone killed someone else: who? You'll find out at the end of the book. Something weird is happening: what? You'll find out at the end of the book. The reader learns to chase, and the momentum becomes unstoppable.

You'll find out the big answer after a string of smaller drip-drip-drip answers. The big answer is parceled out slowly and parsimoniously. In *Killing Floor*, my first novel featuring Jack Reacher, something weird is happening in a small Georgia town. O.K., great, but what? Well, it seems to be something to do with money. Fine, but what exactly? Well, it seems to be about getting hold of perfect blank paper for counterfeiting purposes. Wonderful, but where the heck are they getting it? (I'm not going to tell you. Read the book.)

Trusting such a simple system feels cheap and meretricious while you're doing it. But it works. It's all you need. Of course, attractive and sympathetic characters are nice to have; and elaborate and sinister entanglements are satisfying; and impossible-to-escape pits of despair are great. But they're all luxuries. The basic narrative fuel is always the slow unveiling of the final answer.

So don't bake cakes. Make your family hungry instead.

Noose News

AudioGo, who bought the e-book and audio rights to all 13 of Judith van Gieson's mysteries in both the Neil Hamel and Claire Reynier series, will be getting all the e-books up for sale on Kindle, Sony, iPad, Nook and Kobo this month. They will be doing the audio books at a rate of two a month starting in March. Congratulations, Judith—don't you love seeing you're your characters in a new setting?

J.L. (Janet) Greger is having another book signing for *Coming Flu*. It will be at the Menaul Book Exchange on Saturday, February 9, from 1 to 3. It's located at 9409 Menaul Blvd. NE (between Moon and Eubank) in Albuquerque.

Los Angeles, California –Sisters in Crime/Los Angeles and SoCal Mystery Writers of America welcome both members and non-members to the 2013 California Crime Writers Conference for a weekend of June 22-23, 2013. Workshops are geared to the needs of both emerging and established mystery writers.

Sunday's keynote speaker, Elizabeth George, will also lead a workshop on "Finding Your Process." Michael Levin will speak on "Take Your Manuscript From Good To Great: 12 Things You Must Do To Make your Novel 'Unrejectable'!"

Other scheduled speakers include Adrienne Lombardo, literary agent, who is actively looking for clients who write crime fiction; T. Jefferson Parker: multiple Edgar award-winning and bestselling author; Hank Phillippi Ryan, award-winning author, multiple Emmy-award winning news reporter, MWA national board member and incoming president of national Sisters in Crime; and Marcia Clark: former Los Angeles County Deputy D.A. Lead prosecutor in the OJ Simpson trial and crime fiction author.

C&D Members!

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

Reviews

Rob's Random Shots

January Case File Number 1

November Hunt by Jess Lourey, Midnight Ink, 2012, 269 pp (TP)

I came gratefully to this wonderful story after trying and failing to read another mystery that was the worst written book I have ever encountered. By contrast, this novel, Jess Lourey's seventh in her "Murder-by-Month" series set in small-town northern Minnesota, was like discovering a winning lottery ticket.

You know I never exaggerate.

Jess's novel is complex. She renders her isolated setting perfectly (if there's this much snow and below zero temperatures in November, what will her December through March novels be like?) and limns a quirky cast, headed by her spunky, bumbling amateur heroine, librarian and student PI Mira James.

Lourey shares an advantage that mystery authors Steve Brewer and Richard Peck share: She writes in first person and Mira's thoughts and predicaments are often as laugh-worthy as her dialogue.

Doubt me? Here are some samples:

—Mira's car heater doesn't work and she's living and eating hand-to-mouth, so she borrows a fish tank heater and plunks it in her back seat.

—Concerned about her thinning hair, she takes someone else's prescription pills and worries about facial hair, only to have a "hot date" spoiled by uncontrolled belching that she compares to sewage.

—She fails to recognize clues until too late, when a person providing them can't be recontacted because he's since been killed.

The plot centers on the apparently accidental hunting death of the most important businessman in the town of Battle Lake, who ran an REI-like outdoor supplies powerhouse, the county's biggest employer. Unlicensed Mira is hired by the man's daughter to find out if it really was an accident. This begins lots of

window peeping, attempts to follow suspects, ham-handed ploys to elicit alibi information, and finally a frantic car ride through a blizzard with an untrustworthy companion only to have a big surprise ““reveal”” sprung on Mira (and we readers) at literally the eleventh hour.

Here are a few samples of Lourey’s inspired loony thoughts and dialogue of Mira and suspects she meets:

—“Now that I’ve spilled, why don’t you explain why you looked like you’d been shat out of a snowman?”

—Dancing ice shavings turned the inside of the Toyota into a roving snowglobe. “What sort of goat-ropping idiot drives a car without heat in Minnesota at the end of November?”

—“I used to be afraid of nursing homes as a result of a poorly thought-out eighth grade field trip. I’d rather go naked for the rest of the year than grow old and be shipped off to a nursing home.”

I regret somewhat coming to this author so far into what must be a zany series. But I plan to look for the May through October novels to make up for what I’ve missed. Look for this book in the January book box. ♦

January Case File Number 2

Accustomed to the Dark by Walter Satterthwaite, UNM Press, 1996, 245 pp (TP)

Explanatory note: This is at least my 94th Random Shot for the Nooseletter, not counting a few shorter bonus reviews I’ve done. Between reading Jess Lourey’s November Hunt (reviewed above) and this volume, I read and rejected six other mysteries. I have never had to read so many novels in a row and decline to review all of them before. So in order to meet deadline, I pulled a 15-year-old novel I hadn’t read off the shelf and returned to one of my favorite PI authors.

Accustomed to the Dark begins with reintroducing us to old friends in Santa Fe, PI Joshua Croft and his boss and lover Rita Mondragon. But we don’t get to enjoy this reunion. In Chapter One, an unseen marksman shoots Rita in the head, nearly killing her. She’s put into intensive care and operated on.

Joshua, left without a scratch, learns that an old enemy, Ernie Martinez, who had tried to kill him and Rita six years earlier, had escaped that day from the State Prison near Santa Fe. Since there is little Joshua can do while an unconscious Rita is in recovery from surgery, he gathers information and begins to follow a trail of clues, including dead bodies, left by Martinez and his cell mate, Luiz Lucero. The information on the jail break was mishandled and Joshua and Rita were not warned of the escapes.

Most crimes Joshua investigates keep him in New Mexico. But the trail of these two takes him from a double murder in Santa Fe to an abandoned house in Las Vegas, New Mexico. He meets an old lady neighbor there and tells her who he’s after and why and is surprised when she has a lot of good information for him. “Sometimes,” he thinks, “telling the truth works.”

Those clues take him first to Denver, where he meets a recluse who keeps careful records on the comings and goings of his neighbors. The Las Vegas neighbor and this recluse stand out as two sympathetically drawn supporting characters that go beyond the usual minor characters we find in mystery novels. Picking up locational clues in Denver, Joshua is off to Kansas en route to New Orleans. If you didn’t recognize it by now, this is not so much a mystery (we know who dunnit) as a chase thriller, a how-to novel about how a PI can find clues and sustain a pursuit of suspects across jurisdictional lines.

Before he can reach New Orleans, Joshua is rerouted to Texas briefly when it appears the two suspects he’s pursuing were killed in a gasoline tanker collision. But not fooled for a minute, he follows new information to the Florida Everglades where we are treated to the best supporting character in the book, an enigmatic widowed former spy named Carpenter.

Sometimes you have to shuck a lot of oysters to find a pearl like this book. Makes me glad I didn’t give up. ♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

Key:

PB = Paperback
TP = Trade paperback
HC = Hardcover

9 Dragons and The Drop by Michael Connelly
2009 and 2011, Little, Brown, 374 and 388 pp.

These are two books in Connelly's Harry Bosch series. Harry is an LA detective, who in *9 Dragons* is in the Robbery Homicide Division and in *The Drop* has moved to the Open Unsolved Unit, essentially a cold case group reviewing old unsolved cases in light of new technologies and information.

These are the first Connelly books I have read, but they won't be my last. They are well-crafted, knowledgeable police procedurals, with interesting characters, and many elaborate and devious plot twists. Don't feel bad about getting misled by the red herrings. Harry is too.

9 Dragons starts with a liquor store robbery gone bad and turning into a homicide. A Triad connection leads Harry to David Chu in the Asian Gang Unit. The action shifts from Los Angeles to Hong Kong, where Harry's daughter, who is living with her mother, is kidnapped. Harry's search in Hong Kong with his ex wife's bodyguard provides some interesting setting and cultural differences. The action concludes back in LA with a number of surprising plot twists.

In *The Drop*, Harry and Chu (who is now his new partner in the Open Unsolved Unit) are given an old rape/murder case where new DNA tests have identified a suspect. The only problem is that the suspect was only nine years old at the time. Is there an explanation or has there been some mix-up in the samples for different cases either at LAPD or at the lab? If it is a mix up, the confusion and lack of credibility could lead to a lot of convictions over the years being challenged.

One plot line follows Harry trying to resolve this ambiguous situation, which leads to a series of still open homicide cases. The other plot line has Harry trying to determine if the death of a city councilor's son was suicide or murder. The councilor, a former high level

LAPD official, specifically asked that Harry be assigned to the case, although they are bitter enemies and have fought over previous cases. This leads to not only to police procedures, but also police politics and city corruption.

As more evidence is collected it alternately points to each of two possible outcomes. Finally, Harry comes to a conclusion that the councilor vigorously challenges and tries to change. ♦

—Olin Bray (ohbray@nmia.com)

Counting to Infinity by J. L. Abramo, St Martin's Minotaur, 2004, 229 pp (HC)

This is the third Jake Diamond book. The first, *Catching Water in a Net*, was the winner of the PWA/Minotaur Award for the Best First Novel.

Jake Diamond is a hard-boiled San Francisco private eye in the classic sense. A Chicago thug barges into his office and hauls him to Chicago for a case he can't refuse. The client, a high powered lawyer, wants to know what his brother, who was killed in their office, was doing on his various trips to California – romance, meetings with the mob, or what.

In the elaborate plot, one thing leads to another and red herrings become key plot twists. Contrary to the classical PI story, Jake does not solve the case all by himself. He has an interesting group of friends, acquaintances, and turncoats, many of whom are probably regulars in the series. The story bounces among San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Atlantic City, and concludes in Chicago with an elaborate but believable sting.

Given the brilliant plotting and interesting characters, I will definitely track down the other books in the series. ♦

—Olin Bray (ohbray@nmia.com)

Series Mysteries

Phantom Prey by John Sandford

The 18th book in the Lucas Davenport mystery series is set in the modern-day Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Lucas' wife Weather asks him to look into a cold case for a friend. Austin's daughter Frances has been missing for months and is assumed murdered, although her body was not found, and the police moved on to newer cases.

Lucas agrees to look into the case, thinking there is not much he can do, but when Frances' Goth friends are murdered one by one, he is hot on the trail of a mysterious Goth known as Fairy, and gets shot while in pursuit.

The story is told from both Lucas' and Fairy's point of view in parallel, so the reader is ahead of Davenport at times during his investigation. He follows the clues both logically and intuitively, and ends up solving multiple subplots.

The Lucas Davenport series is one of my favorite mystery series. I recommend it to anyone who enjoys gritty police procedurals, and suggest reading the books in order to fully enjoy the development of the characters. ♦

Dust to Dust by Lillian Stewart Carl

This is the second novel in the "Ashes to Ashes" gothic mystery series set in modern-day Scotland. The story reunites researchers Rebecca Reid and Michael Campbell.

Rebecca is ecstatic to return to Scotland and be with her beloved Michael again, after half a year of transatlantic phone calls. She has a few qualms about their upcoming assignment to excavate a Scottish ruin, however.

Dr. Jerry Kleinfelter has a big reputation, but rumor is he "salted" a dig to get sensational results, and then blamed an assistant. Not only is Jerry in charge of the Rudesburn Priory dig, he has contracted with a film company for publicity, not behavior the scholarly historians approve of.

Little by little, each team member's character develops, and relationships form. The personalities of the team members, how they complement and clash with one another, are the meat of the book.

Rudesburn Priory is said to be haunted by a former prioress, which appeals to team member Adele's beliefs in the paranormal. A figure in white appears, and team members hear chanting.

An all-too-real body is discovered, dressed

up to imitate a ghost. For the remainder of the book, the police investigate the team members, uncover secrets, and try to guard the excavation site and nearby town.

The secret treasures of the priory are discovered, and the story's unsurprising happy ending is delightful.

I recommend reading the first book of the series, *Ashes to Ashes*, prior to this one, to understand how Rebecca and Michael met, and how their professional qualifications make them an ideal team for historical research—or sleuthing. ♦

The Mephisto Club by Tess Gerritsen.

The 6th book of the Rizzoli & Isles mystery series by Tess Gerritsen, set in modern-day Boston, Massachusetts. Jane Rizzoli is a police homicide detective; Maura Isles is the medical examiner.

Violent murder, including dismemberment, torture and ritualistic symbolism, prevent Jane and Maura from enjoying the Christmas holidays with family and friends. Instead they must work with The Mephisto Club, a group of researchers who believe in a race of evil non-humans, to identify the serial killer, who seems to be reporting kills to Jane's nemesis, Joyce O'Donnell.

In a parallel plot on a separate timeline, a strange boy grows up with his cousins but yearns for his mother. Years later, his cousin hides in Europe, certain he is stalking her and will kill her.

The Mephisto Club ties together the two plots. The mysteries are resolved in a suspenseful scene in an isolated location - in a storm, of course!

Although the historical background on the Watchers is interesting, The Mephisto Club has a bit much "woo woo" for my taste. By comparison, the very real and human emotional struggle engulfing Daniel and Maura is given short shrift. Likewise the sad yet occasionally comical conflict between Jane's parents. Even the forensic detail seems a bit thin in this installment of the series. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Giving Mom's Book Five Stars? Amazon May Cull Your Review

Excerpted from an article by David Streitfeld in the New York Time, December 23, 2012

Giving raves to family members is no longer acceptable. Neither is writers' reviewing other writers. But showering five stars on a book you admittedly have not read is fine.

After several well-publicized cases involving writers buying or manipulating their reviews, Amazon is cracking down. Writers say thousands of reviews have been deleted from the shopping site in recent months.

Amazon has not said how many reviews it has killed, nor has it offered any public explanation. So its sweeping but hazy purge has generated an uproar about what it means to review in an era when everyone is an author and everyone is a reviewer.

Is a review merely a gesture of enthusiasm or should it be held to a higher standard? Should writers be allowed to pass judgment on peers the way they have always done offline or are they competitors whose reviews should be banned? Does a groundswell of raves for a new book mean anything if the author is soliciting the comments?

In a debate percolating on blogs and on Amazon itself, quite a few writers take a permissive view on these issues.

The mystery novelist J. A. Konrath, for example, does not see anything wrong with an author indulging in chicanery. "Customer buys book because of fake review = zero harm," he wrote on his blog.

Some readers differ. An ad hoc group of purists has formed on Amazon to track its most prominent reviewer, Harriet Klausner, who has over 25,000 reviews. They do not see how she can read so much so fast or why her reviews are overwhelmingly — and, they say, misleadingly — exaltations.

"Everyone in this group will tell you that we've all been duped into buying books based on her reviews," said Margie Brown, a retired city clerk from Arizona.

Once a populist gimmick, the reviews are vital to making sure a new product is not lost in the digital wilderness. Amazon has refined the reviewing process over the years, giving customers the opportunity to rate reviews and comment on them. It is layer after layer of possible criticism.

"A not-insubstantial chunk of their infrastructure is based on their reviews — and all of that depends on having reviews customers can trust," said Edward W. Robertson, a science fiction novelist who has watched the debate closely.

Nowhere are reviews more crucial than with books, an industry in which Amazon captures nearly a third of every dollar spent. It values reviews more than other online booksellers like Apple or Barnes & Noble, featuring them prominently and using them to help decide which books to acquire for its own imprints by its relatively new publishing arm.

So writers have naturally been vying to get more, and better, notices. Several mystery writers, including R. J. Ellory, Stephen Leather and John Locke, have recently confessed to various forms of manipulation under the general category of "sock puppets," or online identities used to deceive. That resulted in a widely circulated petition by a loose coalition of writers under the banner, "No Sock Puppets Here Please," asking people to "vote for book reviews you can trust."

Ragan Buckley, an aspiring novelist active in the campaign against Mrs. Klausner under the name "Sneaky Burrrito," is a little weary. "There are so many fake reviews that I'm often better off just walking into a physical store and picking an item off the shelf at random," she said.

2013 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, January 22, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, February 26, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, March 26, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, April 23, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, May 28, 7:00 p.m.

Meetings are free to the public.

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

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

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

Summary of Findings

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

†*Nooseletter* Submissions†

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Still not a member of Sisters in Crime?

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

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

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

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

**Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime
Croak & Dagger Chapter, Albuquerque, NM, 19 November 2012**

Board members present: President and Treasurer Olin Bray, Vice President Joan Saberhagen, Secretary Fred Aiken, Program Chair Rita Herther, Membership Chair Pat Wood, and Website Coordinator Susan Zates. Jan Bray and Rob Kresge, incoming board members, were also present.

Olin called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. at the home of Secretary Fred Aiken. Minutes of the September board meeting were not available. As Treasurer, President Bray announced that the Treasury held \$2,551.66. The chapter has 48 members. Not all of the National Sisters-in-Crime members living in New Mexico are chapter members. Dues for 2013 are now due. A dues notification will be sent to all Croak and Dagger members.

Old Business:

An extended discussion was held on the November readers panel on how this program will work.

Olin Bray reported on his conversation with Beth Wasson, SinC secretary regarding Chapter membership requiring membership in the National Organization. The board felt that it is in the best interest of the chapter not to take any action at this time in order for SinC to address our concerns on the underlying issues; other SinC Chapters have expressed similar concerns.

New Business:

Elections will be held at the November general meeting. The nominations for officers are President – Jan Bray, Vice President – Joan Saberhagen, Secretary – Rob Kresge, Treasurer – Fred Aiken. The slate will be emailed to the chapter members along with absentee voting information. Absentee voting deadline is noon on Tuesday, November 27. The secretary will bring paper for the election. President Bray will solicit nominations from the floor.

Fred Aiken circulated a list of the winners of the New Mexico/Arizona Book Awards.

Future programs:

Rita reported that the following speakers are scheduled: In January, Gail Rubin, author of *A Good Good-Bye*; in February, Chris Eboch, author of adventure and mystery books for children and adults; in March, crime scene photographer Jerry Goffe; and in April author Richard Peck.

Other activities:

Special event for January is a play at the Adobe Theater. We will attend the January 13 matinee performance. Each person needs to order their tickets from the Adobe Theater using their web site. Tickets are \$12 per person. We will meet around 1:30 p.m. Those wanting to meet for dinner after the performance need to e-mail Susan for a head count.

Next meeting:

Jan Bray announced that, if she is elected, all 2013 board meetings will be held at her home.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

—Respectfully submitted, Fred A. Aiken, Secretary