

BLOODLETTER

CRIMINAL ENTERPRISES

Chapter News

Back Together Again

By Nina Mansfield

This fall our chapter started having in-person meetings at the Jefferson Market Library for the first time since February 2020. Understandably, many of our members were still hesitant to venture to physical events. Luckily, we were able to operate in a hybrid format allowing those who were unable to attend in-person the opportunity to join meetings via Zoom. Many of our chapter members took advantage of the hybrid option.

September started off with a program appropriately titled, “**Summer is Over—Get Back to That Manuscript.**” Bonnie Zindel, a writing expert, psychoanalyst, and a founding editor and creative literary editor of *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, shared a variety of tips about how to get out of the summer slump.

Unfortunately, an event many of us look forward to in early October, the marketplace at the **Brooklyn Book Festival**, was canceled this year due to severe winds. Hopefully the weather will cooperate next year!

Our October chapter meeting, a panel entitled “**New Directions in Cozies**” was moderated by board member **Mariah Fredericks** (author of the recently published and critically acclaimed *The Lindberg Nanny*). The panel featured board member **Sarah E. Burr** (*#FollowMe for Murder, Too Much to Candle*), chapter member **Zac Bissonnette**, (*A Killing in Costumes*), and Allison Montclair (*A Rogue’s*



(From L. to R.) Dawn Barclay, Mary Jo Robertiello and Carol Binkowski enjoy the Holiday Party.



(From L. to R) Guest of Honor Alison Gaylin and Wendy Corsi Staub enjoy dinner with Elizabeth Kerri Mahon and Mariah Fredericks at our Holiday party.



Judy Hudson (l.) and Elizabeth Crowens (r.) enjoying themselves at our Holiday Party.

Back Together Again...

Company.) The lively conversation covered a range of topics including how cozies have changed over the years and the direction cozies may be heading in the future.

In November, our chapter was joined by Belarminia Ortiz, a retired DOI Investigator for “**Secrets Behind Prison Bars.**” Ortiz’s bio states, “The DOI is the City’s Inspector General, with independent oversight of City government. Their investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City.” Interviewed by chapter member **Jacquetta Szathmari**, Ortiz shared stories about going undercover to find evidence of smuggling into the prison system.

In December we came together for our first in-person holiday party since 2019. **Guests of Honor Alison Gaylin and Wendy Corsi Staub** joined us for the event. Gaylin is a *USA Today* and international bestselling author who has won the Edgar and Shamus awards. Wendy Corsi Staub is a *NYTimes* and *USA Today* bestselling author of more than ninety novels. She is also a chapter member! The two spoke briefly about their experiences as female authors, and joined us for dinner. It was truly a festive evening!

In January, we’ll be kicking off the year with our Annual Open Mic Night via Zoom. The chapter plans to continue to meet either on Zoom or via a hybrid format for the foreseeable future to accommodate as many members as possible.



***Nina Mansfield** is a co-vice president of the NY/Tri-State Chapter of SinC, and editor of Bloodletter. She is a published and produced playwright, and author of the YA mystery, Swimming Alone.*

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING AN ARTICLE TO BLOODLETTER? CONTACT NINA MANSFIELD AT NINA@NINAMANSFIELD.COM.



Cathi Stoler (l.) and Catherine Siemann (r.) are in a festive mood at our Holiday Party.



Alison Gaylin (l.) and Wendy Corsi Staub (r.) say a few words before dinner at our Holiday Party.

OUR BOARD

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Alison von Rosenvinge, writing as D.A. Bartley

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GUEST DETECTIVE

A Guest Post from a Chapter Member

Mixed Media: Art, Crime, and Romance

by Claudia Riess

Ancient times: Vassar, B.C.—Before Coed. The college’s elitist reputation right on the mark. A pipsqueak from Flatbush, Brooklyn, I am clearly out of my element. It’s the start of freshman year, and I’m sitting on the edge of my bed alongside a classmate, getting to know her. She asks me where I summered. I say my front porch. During the course of our conversation, she blandly tells me her father’s sugar plantation in Cuba had been confiscated by Castro’s rebels in 1958. Her delivery, as much as the fact itself, serves as a culture shock.

Many years later, in the modern era, I off-handedly mentioned to my brother, Jonathan, an art history professor at the University of Cincinnati, that I’d been thinking about writing an art suspense novel. I should insert here that I’d always had a deep connection with art, ingrained very early on with family trips to the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, often followed by Chinese food take-out and lively conversations around the kitchen table. When I was older, my interest in the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of art expanded to include the more sordid—criminal— aspects of the art world. Unlike other created entities—symphonies, dances, poems, plays—works of art can be bought and sold at any price, depending on the temperament of the times and the manipulations of influential collectors. They can be forged, ransomed, and, as singularities, destroyed. It is an area of human endeavor where the most sublime and basest instincts clash. A perfect amalgam for writing fiction!

It had taken years for me to come to that point, but my brother replied without losing a beat: “How about Michelangelo’s *Battle of Cascina*? Maybe finding a lost study for it?” At that moment, by some fluke of the imagination, the chat I’d had with my classmate merged with my brother’s suggestion and became the genesis of a plot: The sugar plantation owner was an art enthusiast whose prized collection was stolen by a group of revolutionary wannabes needing cash to buy arms. This would tie in to a present-day search for a Michelangelo lost work. (The idea of involving his fictional contemporary, Vittorio da Lucca, would come later, in the plot-honing phase.) This was the start of what Level Best Books would later characterize as my “art history mystery series.” The title of Book 1: *Stolen Light*.

Stolen Light was my first novel that contained historical content that required research, and I realized early on that along with my passion for inventing stories was an obsessive drive to maintain historical accuracy. A delicate balance, but what writer doesn’t enjoy a challenge? Sometimes I look for—or stumble upon—individuals of a particular era whom I could juxtapose in a new and threatening way without distorting their real-life behaviors and inclinations. In other words, create a set of murderous circumstances that *might* have happened—and that years later would resurface to disastrous effect.

For instance, here’s how *Knight Light* (Book 3) was hatched. I was reading about the artist Marcel Duchamp, an avid chess player. I came across a quote of his: “Not all artists are chess players, but all chess players are artists.” Aha. I looked up contemporaneous chess players and found Alexander Alekhine, world chess champion. *His* quote: “Chess for me is not a game, but an art.” Reading further, I learned that he and Duchamp had played together on Team France at the 1933 Chess Olympiad. The fact that Alekhine’s post-war death in 1946 (very likely a political assassination) remains a mystery to this day was the final prompt. I would use this information to jump-start a plot that would begin with the looting of an art gallery during Germany’s occupation of Paris.

To Kingdom Come, Book 4 and most recent of the series, was the most difficult project to date because I was plunging into territory that to me was virtually unknown: the seizure of art and artifacts from Africa during the colonial era. It was prompted by a newspaper article about the stalled efforts in its repatriation. What fanned the flames was *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*. In the book, Dan Hicks details what the British called its “punitive expedition” of 1897, a retaliatory strike against the Kingdom of Benin that far outweighed its provocation.

Mixed Media: Art, Crime, and Romance cont'd

To Kingdom Come is in no way a moral tract. It is a book of fiction. It starts out at a Zoom meeting of individuals from around the globe whose common goal is to expedite the return of African art. Olivia Chatham, a math teacher at London University, has just begun speaking about her recent find, a journal penned by her great-granduncle, Andrew Barrett, an active member of the Royal Army Medical Service during the 1897 "expedition." Her account is disrupted by an unusual movement in one of the squares on the grid. Frozen disbelief erupts into a frenzy of calls for help as the group, including the victim, watch in horror the enactment of a murder videotaped in real time.

As in Books 1, 2 and 3, amateur sleuths Erika Shawn, art magazine editor, and Harrison Wheatley, art history professor, are at the heart of the plot. And as ever, the ups and downs in their ongoing love story are an important part of it. I'm an incurable romantic. It can't be helped.

I was obsessive about getting the non-fictional segments absolutely correct and still have a nagging feeling that I missed something. I checked and double-checked the spelling of activist's Emery Mwazulu Diyabanza's name; fretted over my Googled translation of a Yoruba phrase; questioned my accuracy in recording dates and interpreting events.

From the standpoint of holding myself accountable to a history that I had been unfamiliar with while allowing myself to freely ad lib on it, writing the book was a baptism by fire.

*Claudia Riess is an award-winning author of seven novels and editor of art history monographs. **To Kingdom Come**, the fourth in her art history mystery series (Level Best Books) was released May 2022. www.claudiarliessbooks.com This article originally appeared in *Mystery Readers Journal*, vol.38, number 3, Fall 2022.*



THE POLICE BLOTTER

Member News

Elle Hartford's novel ***Beauty and the Alchemist*** was released on Aug. 12, 2022 from Phoenix and Kelpie Press. Second in series *Cold as Snow* followed on Sept. 9, and third in series *Mermaid for Danger* came out on Oct. 7. Her short story "Reading into the Root of the Problem" appears in the anthology *A Bookworm of a Suspect* (published April 2022).

Nina Mansfield's short story "Twelve Angry Actors" will appear in the March/April 2023 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*.

Constance Meccarello-Gerson has her ***Snowball the Sherlock Rabbit*** children's series for sale on Amazon and Barnes and Noble. Her Hassle High cozy mysteries are also on Barnes and Noble.

Murder, She Wrote Death on the Emerald Isle by Jessica Fletcher and **Terrie Farley Moran** was released on January 3, 2023.

SJ Rozan, with her new writing partner, John Shen Yen Nee, has published the short story "The Killing of Henry Davenport" in the Jan. 2023 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*.

Lori Robbins' flash fiction story "Mirror Image" is in the November issue of *Women on Writing*. Her third On Pointe mystery, ***Murder in Third Position***, released on November 22nd.

Jacqueline Shortell-McSweeney's NYC Noir, ***Dr. Altman and the Concubines***, has won seven awards, including THE LONDON BOOK FESTIVAL, THE PARIS BOOK FESTIVAL AND THE SAN FRANCISCO BOOK FESTIVAL.

Susan Wingate's novel ***Hotter Than Helen*** (book 2 of the Bobby's Diner series) was released on Nov. 16, 2022 by The Wild Rose Press.

DISTURBING THE PEACE

Upcoming Chapter Events

Annual Open Mic Night

Wednesday, January 18, 2023

Time: 6:30-8:00PM Location: Zoom

Join us for our annual open mic night! We'll be holding this event virtually again this year.

The following authors will read from new and published works: Theresa Verela, Kathleen Kalb, Catherine Siemann, Naomi Rand, Mary Jo Robertiello, Catherine Maiorisi, Cathi Stoler, Sarah Burr, Izolda Trakhenberg, Cynthia Webb, Connie Meccarello, Nancy Good and Samantha Hartford.

Which Conference is Right for You?

Wednesday, February 15, 2023

Time: 6:30-8:00PM Location: Zoom

A survey of upcoming writers' conferences, with panel members who have been there and done that. What's the difference between conferences? How can you best use your time and energy to network, get blurbs and reviews, nab a coveted panel seat? The panel will be moderated by Triss Stein, and feature chapter members Lori Robbins and Elizabeth Crowens. They'll be joined by Wendy Whitman from the Connecticut chapter.

In February we will also have an opportunity for prospective board members to learn what's involved in each position so you can get excited about running for office in the spring.

Spies—Then and Now

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

Time: 6:30-8PM Location: Zoom

This event will feature will feature Mally Becker, James Ziskin and Former FBI turned author Carmen Amato. We will also be joined by guest moderator S. Lee Manning.

Everything Your Publicist Needs You to Know

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Time: 6:30-8:00PM Location: Jefferson Market Library, NYC

Need book exposure? Don't miss our April program, when a publicity expert will explain "Everything Your Publicist Needs You to Know." The event will feature Dulce Botello, Crooked Lane Books Marketing Assistant.

QueryFest 3

Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Time: 6:30-8:00PM Location: Zoom

Our annual QueryFest, where top editors and publishers will review your query letters and give you tips on how to bulletproof them for the best chance at receiving a contract.

End of Year Party

Date: June 14, 2023

Our annual year-end dinner where we will welcome the 2023-2025 Board of Directors!

JOIN OUR BOARD

Are you interested in helping to plan chapter events, or have ideas for how the chapter could better serve its members? If you are curious or interested in running for an office, join us after our chapter meeting on ZOOM on February 15th.