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You should have received two emails asking you to vote for the next President of the Chapter as well as the next Board of Directors.

Note: The first email linked to a ballot with errors. The second email was sent on December 1 and that ballot is correct. If you have not received it, check your spam and trash folders; mine ended up in my trash folder for some reason.

To help with your search, the subject line of the second email is “Hello, this corrected ballot replaces the one erroneously mailed on 11/30/21.”

Sorry for any confusion!

Thank you for voting.



The President's Rap Sheet

Jessica Kaye

Welcome to the end of 2021. December is both finally here and already here. Celebrate the holidays of your choice or if you prefer to say bah humbug, this is the time of year for that, too. The weather is cooperating as I write this column. When the stylus for my iPad is almost too cold to use, it is time to turn on the heat. Thanks, Jack Frost.

We have some SoCalMWA Chapter business. You should have received two emails asking you to vote for the next President of the Chapter as well as the next Board of Directors.

Why two emails, you ask? The first ballot had errors, and so that election had to be ended in order to fix the ballot. That required a second email to go out on December 1st. It is the December 1st email that has the link to the correct ballot. If you have not already voted, I encourage you to please do so.

You may recall that last month I asked if you were a plotter or a pantsier. Our featured reply is from **Sheila Lowe**, who wrote that she is a plotter. In her own words:

“I tried pantsing it on my third book (DEAD WRITE) and found myself floundering with a handful of chapters at 3 months to deadline. At that point I stopped, made a flexible outline (never to be looked at again) and got the book in on time. Oh, at the midpoint I discovered that what I'd planned for the ending needed to come there (like I said, a flexible outline), so had to come up with a different ending.”

That leads me to think that the act of creating an outline is helpful, even if you never look at it again, because the seeds of what you need for your WIP have been planted. In Sheila's case, that seems to have worked.

I have no December query for you, but just the wish for a peaceful season with good health and fewer worries than we have all had to carry.

Jessica

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The EDITOR'S CORNER

Holly West

Hi all,

This morning, I successfully completed [NaNoWriMo 2021](#) with 50,025 words. If you've ever done NaNoWriMo, you know that completion of that 50k does not a finished novel make, but it sure does feel good.

Funny thing though—as happy as I am to have completed it, I feel a little sad. I was content in my writing routine this month in ways I haven't been since, well, last year's NaNoWriMo (which I also completed). I'm left with the question: Where do I go from here?

The appeal of NaNoWriMo for me, and many others, I suspect, is the comraderie. Six days a week, I participated in two 25-minute writing sprints a day with a group of writers from all over the country. These write-ins served as tent poles for my day and while I know I can re-create them for myself, there is always that doubt that I won't maintain the discipline.

At the end of the day (in this case, the month) our work is in our own hands. Having buddies along the way is a great boost, but if we can't find it within ourselves to complete our stories on our own, all the support in the world ultimately won't help. I am the driver. The friends and colleagues I pick up along the way are a bonus.

Going forward, I have a plan, and it starts tomorrow. Doesn't matter that we're in the final weeks of the year—I can't risk losing momentum by waiting until 2022 to finish this novel. NaNoWriMo Part II starts NOW.

I wish you all the happiest of holiday seasons. I can't wait to see you next year!

Holly

The March of Crime is the newsletter of the Southern California Chapter of the Mystery Writers of America.

Editor: [Holly West](#)

Opinions expressed herein are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mystery Writers of America Southern California Chapter.

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OVER the TRANSOM

TIES THAT BIND is the latest of six re-published Barbara Nickolae and/or **Barbara Pronin** titles now available or upcoming on all platforms. The pseudonym Barbara Nickolae was a collaboration between Barbara Pronin and Nickolae Gerstner, each of whom also published under their own names. Edgar Award-winner Mary Higgins Clark blurbbed their work as, “suspenseful and emotionally gripping...”

Mark Bruce’s short story, “Minerva James and the Gods of Sleep and Death” will appear in an upcoming issue of *Sherlock Holmes Mystery Magazine*. This is the 8th Minerva short story to be published.

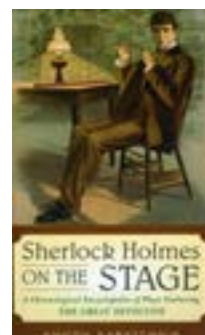
Martin Roy Hill’s latest thriller, CHIMERA ISLAND, was released Nov. 1. A sequel to his novel, POLAR MELT, CHIMERA ISLAND features DSF-Papa, a U.S. Coast Guard special operations team that investigates mysterious events that occur at sea. When an Air Force transport plane evacuating climate change researchers from the island disappears, DSF-Papa is sent to investigate the island and its legend of mysterious deaths and disappearances. Finding themselves trapped on the island, the members of the team must discover the secret of Chimera Island or become part of its legend.

Mike Befeler has a three-book contract with Encircle Publications for the Omnipodge Trilogy of mystery novels. The first book, OLD DETECTIVES HOME, will be published next spring. Here’s a preview: Imagine a retirement home populated with residents such as an aging Hercule Poirot and a dementia-suffering Sherlock Holmes and run by staff including Art Doyle, Dash Hammett and Dot Sayers. In this light-hearted spoof of the mystery genre, every character is either a real person from the mystery writing world or a character from a mystery novel. The top detectives of all time reunite to solve their most difficult whodunit.

John Peyton Cooke’s new short story “Electric Pink” will be published in late December in the new anthology PINK TRIANGLE RHAPSODY, edited by Andrew Wolter and published by Lycan Valley Press.

Annon Kabatchnik’s SHERLOCK HOLMES ON STAGE is being published in Israel in a Hebrew translation. The book cites the many theatrical appearances of the Great Detective since his debut in a one-act musical satire in November 1893. The narrative focuses on plays written or co-written by Arthur Conan Doyle, one-act productions, and plays written by other authors, with entries arranged chronologically and provide plot synopses, production details, and biographical sketches of the playwrights and the actors who made a lasting impression as the fictional sleuth.

Matt Coyle, author of the Rick Cayhill series, was named San Diego Writers Festival 2021 Mystery Writer of the Year.



Member APPEARANCES

Jeri Westerson will host a [Facebook Virtual Book Launch](#) party on Sunday, December 19, at 2 p.m. (PT) for the last-ever Crispin Guest Medieval Noir, *THE DEADLIEST SIN*. Due to unforeseen events, there will be no in-person event. This is the only event for the last Crispin Guest book. You need not have an account with Facebook to attend. Includes videos of author reading, answering questions, knights jousting, lots of interaction and laughs, with some very special giveaways. [Visit this link to attend.](#)

On December 11 and 12, **Sheila Lowe** will be joining a roomful of authors at a book fair: EP Foster Library, 651 E. Main Street, Ventura. Open to the general public.

Ellen Byron/Maria DiRico has several events coming up: December 1, 4 p.m. (PT), [in conversation with Edith Maxwell/Maddie Day](#) (virtual) via Belmont Books. On December 7 at 5:30 p.m. (PT), Ellen and “Chicks on the Case” blogmates **Jennifer J. Chow**, Cynthia Kuhn, and Becky Clark will come together for a [virtual event via Creating Conversations](#). And on December 9 at 11:30 a.m. (PT), enjoy holiday treats at an in-person [Meet & Greet with Ellen, Jennifer, and Kim Davis](#) at Creating Conversations, 2850 Artesia Blvd. #209 Redondo Beach. Finally, Ellen, Jennifer, **Naomi Hirahara**, and **Wendall Thomas** will celebrate their latest releases in person at [Book Carnival](#) on December 11 at 2 p.m. (PT). There will be treats.



Jennifer J. Chow and Ellen Byron

Once Upon A Crime presents “Cozy Up for the Holidays” with Abby Collette (*BODY AND SOUL FOOD*), Andrea J. Johnson (*HOW TO CRAFT A KILLER COZY MYSTERY*), **Jennifer J. Chow** (*MIMI LEE CRACKS THE CODE*), M. V. Byrne (*ISABEL PUDDLES INVESTIGATES*), and V.M. Burns (*KILLER WORDS*) on December 2 at 5 p.m. (PT). Hosted by Jessica Laine and Shelley Kubitz. [Click here to register.](#)

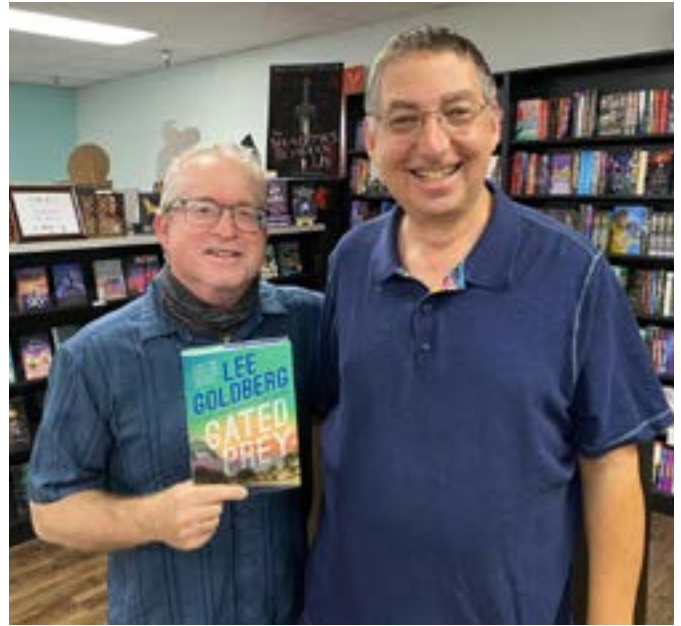
Matt Coyle will be discussing *LAST REDEMPTION*, the 8th novel in the award-winning Rick Cahill crime series, on December 4 at 2 p.m. in-store at Book Carnival in Orange. His virtual events are: December 2, [Poisoned Pen Bookstore](#); December 3, [Crime Corner with Matt Coyle](#); December 14, [Vroman's Bookstore](#) (in discussion with **Naomi Hirahara**); and December 15, [Murder by the Book](#).

Member APPEARANCES

Rachel Howzell Hall interviewed **Lee Goldberg** at the launch event for his new book **GATED PREY** at the Calabasas Library in late October. **Harley Jane Kozak** and **Matt Witten** joined them. And **Matt Coyle** showed up for Lee's signing at Mysterious Galaxy in San Diego.



L–R: Harley Jane Kozak, Lee Goldberg, Rachel Howzell Hall, Matt Witten

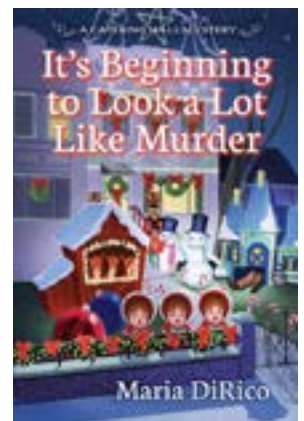


L–R: Matt Coyle, Lee Goldberg

Tell Me Your Tricks!

SoCalMWA Members Share What Works

“My TV background informs my writing process. I outline, which is ironic because I hated writing outlines for sitcoms. You couldn’t just lay out the plot. You had to come up with jokes to include while you were breaking the story, which was the mental equivalent of that thing where you pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time. When I began writing mysteries, I found myself defaulting to outlining. I start with a “logline,” which is really a paragraph summary of a possible story. I expand the logline into a beat sheet, then a chapter-by-chapter outline. I call it a fluid outline because while the bones stay the same and I even transpose whole sections of dialogue from the outline into the manuscript sometimes, chapter breaks change, new characters appear, I discover story beats don’t track, and always, ALWAYS – I end up short. Once by 20k words! But the good news is, my first drafts are pretty solid. This is something else I’ve carried over from my TV days. Showrunners want strong first draft writers because it saves so much time in production if you don’t have to page-one a script.”—**Ellen Byron**/Maria DiRico



[continued on pg 8](#)

On Beginning—And Ending—a Series

by **Jeri Westerson**

It's tough to say goodbye to your characters, to not live in that world with them anymore. But a series is an ever-changing challenge of time and effort. And sometimes, an author needs to lay their characters to bed, to pen the final brushstroke of their lives and let them live on in a reader's imagination.

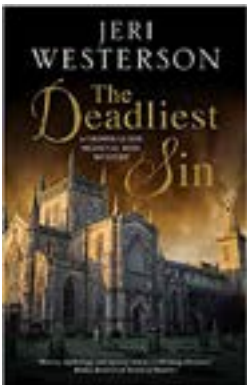
In 2003, the kind of historical novels I was writing weren't the kind of historical novel editors wanted to publish. I was always after the unique character, fully of their time, but not necessarily in the court of the king. In a world where bookstore shelves were full of *Ann Boleyn*, where was the space given to my take on medieval life? A former agent suggested I try mysteries and since "medieval mysteries" was a legitimate genre, I had to learn to write a mystery.

My blueprint became *THE MALTESE FALCON*. It's a book filled with memorable characters, not the least of which was Sam Spade, a man who knew who he was. I wanted to write a medieval private eye while still using the tropes of the hardboiled PI; my detective would be a disgraced knight, one who lost it all, with the need to remake himself on the mean streets of 14th century London. *THE MALTESE FALCON* had something else going for it. The search for the falcon. This became in my mind something like a religious relic, which gave me the idea to fill the series with different relics or venerated objects that someone was trying to find or get rid of.

The medieval noir series almost came to a more abrupt end when St. Martin's, after publishing the first six books, would publish no more. There was a day in the not-so-distant past that once a publisher ended a series, it was dead and done. But in this age of digital books, self-publishing, and more openness as to sales numbers, my agent felt there was still some life in the series and that we could find a new publishing home for it. Severn House, a UK publisher, welcomed the series with open arms. They ended up publishing nine more of the novels and would have been happy to publish more, but to tell you the truth, after writing several paranormal series alongside the medieval noir mysteries, *I* was tired.

I had always planned an end point for my medieval noir series and the historical timeline created the perfect opportunity. I know that there are readers who will be disappointed that a favorite series comes to an end. Believe me, I've put a lot of emotional investment in these characters and books too. But it was time to write a replacement series—a new mystery set in a different era, still historical, with Henry VIII's real court jester Will Somers as the amateur sleuth—and I knew I couldn't move on until the medieval noir series had come to an end.

That new book is finally with my agent. One door closes...



Los Angeles native **Jeri Westerson** is the author of historical novels and fifteen Crispin Guest Medieval Noir Mystery novels, a series nominated for thirteen national awards from the Agatha to the Shamus. Jeri also writes paranormal novels, such as the urban fantasy *BOOKE OF THE HIDDEN* series, a werewolf mystery series *MOONRISERS*, and the Enchanter Chronicles Trilogy, a gaslamp-steampunk fantasy series, the last of which is *LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED*, and her LGBTQ mystery series, the Skyler Foxe Mysteries written under the name Haley Walsh.

The last Crispin Guest Medieval Noir Mystery, *THE DEADLIEST SIN*, comes out on December 7. See her Crispin Guest titles and all her other novels at JeriWesterson.com.

Tell Me Your Tricks!—[continued from pg 6](#)



“I use the sweat method. Right now I’m in the middle of writing a short story and also noodling on a plot for a novel. As often happens, I write a scene or plot some portion of the hopefully novel-to-be and have to ask myself, have I done this before, have I seen this before? More specifically the questions is, the stranger walks into the bar, a scene we’ve all read countless times, written it ourselves, so what’s different this time? What way into the scene can I pull off that tells you something about the character? What thought, detail or dialogue can I use that differentiates this from the usual? Once I can answer that, and apply this approach to other passages, I feel I’m on my way to defining the character to me and, fingers crossed, to the reader.”—**Gary Phillips**

The LAST WORD

“For the most part, Jacinta’s decorations were on par with her neighbors. But one item set her apart from all others. In the dead center of her small yard stood a four-foot animatronic of adored Astoria native son Tony Bennett, dressed as Santa Claus.”

—IT’S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE MURDER, Maria DiRico