



In This Issue...

News

- [Spinsters Ink](#)
- [Center for New Words](#)
- [Orange Prize Shortlists](#)
- [The Nebulas](#)

Books

- [Ann Christophersen](#)
- [Linda Bubon](#)
- [Tish Hayes](#)
- [Pam Harcourt](#)
- [For the Kids](#)
- [Mysteries](#)



About BTWOF

Books To Watch Out For publishes monthly e-letters celebrating books on various topics. Each issue includes new book announcements, brief reviews, commentary, news and, yes, good book gossip.

More Books for Women

Covers the finest in thinking women's reading, plus mysteries, non-sexist children's books, and news from women's publishing. Written by the owners and staff at Women & Children First, and friends.

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The Lesbian Edition

More Books for Women

- May 2006 -
Volume 2 Number 5

Welcome to **More Books for Women #8.**

This issue leads with a few news bites, followed by this issue's round-up of excellent reading, then the Kids section, followed by Mysteries.

I have to say I'm intrigued that Threshold, Simon & Schuster's new, conservative imprint, hasn't (yet) seen fit to send **Books To Watch Out For** a review copy of Vice-Presidential daughter Mary Cheney's *Now It's My Turn: A Daughter's Chronicle of Political Life*, despite our request several months ago. I wonder if that's an oversight, or if they think it will get a more sympathetic reading in the mainstream press than from us?

News

Venerable feminist publishing institution, **Spinsters Ink**, has emerged from its recent hibernation under the care and ownership of Linda Hill who also runs Bella Books. The first book in the new incarnation is **French Postcards** by Jane Merchant, a short novel set among the wives of Americans working in France. It's a reprint of a title that didn't get much circulation in its previous edition. Spinsters has eight other titles in the pipeline, including a new novel by Sheila Ortiz-Taylor and a mystery series by Jennifer L. Jordan. More info at: www.spinsters-ink.com

The **Center for New Words** (which used to be New Words Bookstore, and promises to open a bookstore again, eventually) is just launching a new website. One of my favorite features is the Watch/Listen page where you can access audio and video recordings of many of the readings CNW has sponsored in recent years — including the keynote speakers from their recent Women Action Media (WAM!) conference.

Check out the website at: www.centerfornewwords.org

Find some good company at: www.centerfornewwords.org/watch

The Orange Prize Shortlist:

The History of Love by Nicole Krauss

Beyond Black by Hilary Mantel

The Accidental by Ali Smith

On Beauty by Zadie Smith

Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living by Carrie Tiffany

The Night Watch by Sarah Waters

This year's shortlist includes three writers who have previously been shortlisted for the Orange — the two Smiths (no relation) and Sarah Waters, one relatively unknown book, and writers from the U.K., Australia, and the U.S. The prize, which gets remarkably little attention in the U.S., is for the best novel by a woman written in English. It carries a £30,000 prize.

The Orange New Writers Award Shortlist

Disobedience by Naomi Alderman

The Dream Life of Sukhanov by Olga Grushin

A Thousand Years of Good Prayers by Yiyun Li

This is the second year that the Orange has sponsored the New Writers Award. It carries a £10,000 prize.

covers both lesbian books and the whole range of books lesbians like to read. It covers news of both the women in print movement and mainstream publishing. Written and compiled by Carol Seajay.

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The Gay Men's Edition

announces and reviews new books by and about gay men as well as other books of interest and gay publishing news. Written and compiled by Richard Labonte.

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The Nebulas

Kelly Link, twice reviewed in these pages, won two Nebula Awards this year: *Magic for Beginners* (published by Link's own Small Beer Press) won the Novella award and "The Faery Handbag" won the Novelette Award. Carol Emshwiller won Short Story for "I Live With You."

ColorLines ran a great article on the thriving Toronto Women's Bookstore. Read it at:

www.btwof.com/enews_extras/ImagesLES22/TWB_ColorLines.pdf

Find more about *ColorLines*, a wonderful magazine with a fiercely feminist consciousness that looks at race, culture, and action: www.colorlines.com.

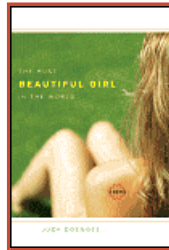
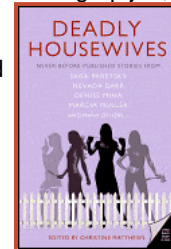
And check out BTWOF's nifty ad offering 3-month Trial Subscriptions to **More Books for Women**, **The Lesbian Edition**, and **The Gay Men's Edition** in the Spring issue of *Ms. Magazine*. We're on page 71.

And now, on to the books.
Yours in spreading the words,

Carol Seajay
Publisher and news mogul

Ann Christophersen is reading...

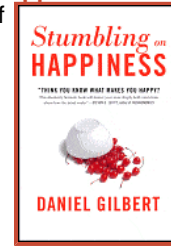
Interested in enjoying some light, funny, ingenious stories this summer? I have just the book for you. It's a collection of short mysteries told by some of the best contemporary women writers in the genre (Sara Paretsky, Nevada Barr, Marcia Muller) as well as some lesser-knowns who do a bang-up job, and the stories are connected thematically: **Deadly Housewives**, the book is called, and the women here concoct some mighty clever ways to do in their hubbies and a whole host of others who annoy them, get in their way, don't do their bidding, have done them wrong — or simply can serve them better dead than alive. They aren't always heroes, these gals, but they are all entertaining. Christine Matthews, editor and contributor, Avon, \$13.95 paper, 0060853271.



The Most Beautiful Girl in the World, a first novel by Judy Doenges, is told in the third person but very much from the perspective of the main character, Robin, who is a schoolgirl at the beginning of the story and a high school graduate at the end. Her family is hardly a model one for a young girl whose mother has just died of cancer: her father is a lost man emotionally who becomes a drug dealer; her grandmother, who comes to help take care of her after the death of her mother, is a prostitute. The three of them live together in a ramshackle house and try to have some semblance of a reasonable life. Luckily, Robin is precocious and a budding lesbian, her father is endearing in his love for her and his old-hippie values, and the grandmother is flat-out a *character*, driving her Cadillac around town and finding creative ways to show her cleavage to anyone who's interested — and most of the men are. I actually loved the characters quite a bit and read to the end just to see how they would all fare. The novel has its limitations, however: it is rather overwritten, particularly in its metaphors, and has some other features of a first novel that has some kinks to work out. Still, I enjoyed reading it and applaud the University of Michigan Press for giving it a chance. \$24 hardcover, 0472115618.

I read **The Art of Possibility**, (Penguin, \$15, 0142001104) which has been out in paper since 2002, for two reasons: one, a sister bookseller in Denver recently told me that it was a really good book; two, I was intrigued by the concept suggested by the title: art? possibility? — I'm in. It is a variety of self-help book, offering suggestions and examples to explain and support the central idea that we limit ourselves in our personal and professional lives by relying on an array of conventions and assumptions that often fail to serve. Rather than put those same old practices in service over and over again,

authors Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander argue on behalf of “re-framing” circumstances we encounter, with an eye to the possibilities they offer instead of the hardships or difficulties or drudgery they may present. What I appreciate about the book is that it really does focus on creativity — and has given me much to experiment with, including the desire to read a new book that just came in called **Stumbling on Happiness** (Knopf, \$24.95, 1400042666). Harvard College Professor of Psychology Daniel Gilbert says of his book that it is distinctly *not* a self-help book, however. What it is is a book about how our minds work — and how absolutely unpredictable the self we become over time, even a relatively short period of time, will feel about decisions and expectations our earlier self thought were obviously the right way to go. Intriguing, yes? I’m going to start reading it tonight and perhaps will let you know the outcome of that experience next month.



And just coming off press:



Alison Bechdel of *Dykes to Watch Out For* fame has a new offering for us: a graphic memoir. In **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic**, Bechdel has drawn and written her way to impressive new heights. This complex — and complexly structured — narrative of growing up in the family she did is a powerful story. The Fun Home in the title refers literally to what the family called the funeral home that housed the family businesses. But it refers to other things as well, for example, the Gothic Revival house the family lived in (which reminded her of the Addams’ family house, a source of some great humor in the story) and the sort of “funhouse mirror” that describes elements of her and her family’s life.

Because the narrative does not proceed in a straight line through time but rather keeps circling back on itself, the story is quite nuanced and layered. This allows her to develop her central metaphor of Daedalus and Icarus, including how their relationship is like (and in the end, significantly unlike) that of her and her father’s. There are many other literary allusions in the book, stemming organically from another feature of this father-daughter connection: both are steeped in books. One doesn’t need to be terribly conversant with these references, however: Bechdel gives the reader most of what she needs to know about them. There’s much more to say about this book because there are many dimensions to it. It’s one to read, then read again to appreciate all that’s here. Houghton Mifflin, \$19.95 hardcover, 0618477942.

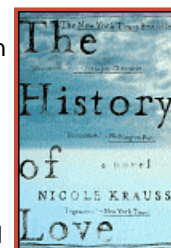
Editor’s note: For more lesbian literary fiction and non-fiction, check out **The Lesbian Edition** of [Books To Watch Out For](#).



Linda Bubon is reading...

In thinking about these three novels, the term “post-feminist” comes to mind, a term I’ve long deplored and to which I’ve always automatically retorted, “I’ll be a post-feminist in the post-patriarchy.” These books were all written by women who, I’m pretty sure (as I’ve talked with all of them), consider themselves feminists. They have wonderful female protagonists who firmly believe that women can do whatever it is they want (fix their families, find lost writers, sing opera, avenge their sister’s murders), but there is no overt feminist “message” or theme. They are all wonderful reads, with a mixture of humor and poignancy.

The History of Love, new in paperback, by Nicole Krauss is a stunning, achingly tender novel written in two voices: an old man who is a Holocaust survivor and a 14-year-old Jewish girl. The voices are so real, so distinctive, that the characters walked off the page and into my mind and heart. There’s an engaging plot, too, concerning a lost book that creates a life of literary fame for one man, hope for its young reader, and resolution, finally, for its true author. I had thought often about lives lost during the Holocaust, and



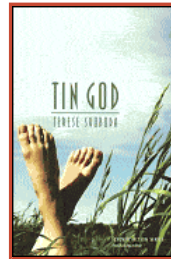
lost art treasures too, but this book made me think of lost literary treasures. What about the poetry and novels that were in manuscripts, the half-finished masterpieces, the bound galleys sitting on editor's desks that we'll never get to read? Krauss made me think anew of all that's been lost to us, but this is ultimately a hopeful story, making me believe in mysterious connections and the steady force of destiny. Norton, \$13.95, 0393328627.

Cage of Stars by Jacqueline Mitchard has a young narrator as well, teenaged Veronica Swan, a good Mormon girl who witnesses the swift, brutal, shocking murder of her two little sisters by a deranged schizophrenic. While this may sound like movie-of-the-week material and is loosely based on a true story, in Mitchard's sure hands, the novel has an unusual grace and charm. She makes the inconceivable real and has a divine gift for expressing universal feelings of grief, loss, anger, and yes, even in these circumstances, forgiveness, and healing. Mature teens will appreciate this novel as well as adults. Warner, \$24.95, 0446578754.

I encountered another quirky teen narrator in Elinor Lipman's new novel, **My Latest Grievance**, a pure delight for a weekend read. Frederica Hatch has been raised by two impeccably politically-correct parents (one a psychologist, the other a sociologist) in a dormitory at a second-rate women's college in Brookline, Mass. They have always told her the truth about everything and spoken to her as an adult. At 15, she is the most precocious, witty, and often obnoxious teenager I've encountered in fiction; that is, they have reaped what they have sown, and the reader gets all the rewards. When Frederica invites her father's first wife, a melodramatic, narcissistic, former dancer into their lives, all hell breaks loose, and Frederica manipulates and insinuates and makes matters, delightfully, much worse. Houghton Mifflin, \$24, 0618644652.



Tish Hayes can't resist...



I can't get enough of the University of Nebraska's Flyover Fiction series. The two novels I've read so far are the most interesting and provocative novels I've read in some time, and both are unmistakably Midwestern voices. Last month I read *Skin* by Kellie Wells. This month I read **Tin God** by Terese Svoboda, a novel narrated by God in the guise of a Nebraska farm woman. The present day stories begin in a field, just after a tornado, with a young man in flashy clothes and a shiny Porsche looking for his lost bag of drugs. This narrative is interspersed with the tale of a Spanish conquistador searching for gold, dying of thirst and discovered by the people whose land he is lost in. Both men are seeking something they will never find — neither can comprehend that what they need to survive is right in front of them. Terese Svoboda brings a poet's sensibility to this novel: her sentences are spare but playful, and it is the details that lead to layers of meaning. University of Nebraska, \$24.95, 0803243316.

Gathering Amy Hempel's four collections of stories together into one volume, **The Collected Stories of Amy Hempel**, creates both the perfect introduction to her work and a complete view of her growth as a writer. This was my first experience with her near-perfect stark prose, and I am so thrilled to have finally discovered her. Very few writers can tell a story with what is left unsaid, but she has mastered the art; story after story left me stunned and wondering how did she do that? Rick Moody provides an insightful introduction with a short look at each of the collections. It will be released in hardcover in May by Simon & Schuster. \$26, 0743289463.



Autobiography of a Blue-Eyed Devil provoked a great discussion this month in the Intergenerational Feminist Book Group. Inga Muscio, author of *Cunt*, presents a history lesson that isn't often taught in the classroom,

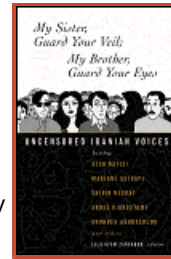
dispelling the myths that maintain the oppression of everyone from which white men benefit. She weaves in her personal experiences and philosophies to create an unconventional narrative. When Inga sticks to facts and when she systematically breaks down oppression she is compelling and passes on really important information. Many in the group felt that her tone is too strident and a tad on the condescending side, but some loved the book and really felt changed and motivated after reading it. Personal taste in writing style aside, Inga Muscio provokes the discussions about race and class that so often get shoved aside. Seal Press, \$15.95, 1580051197.

Pam Harcourt is reading...

Monica Ali's follow-up to her critically acclaimed *Brick Lane*, **Alentejo Blue**, tells the story of a Portuguese village community – much of it through the longings and missed connections of its residents. Characters weave in and out of one another's stories until you begin waiting for the local-made-good to come home and fulfill expectations (or not), for the English writer to finally offend people beyond repair, for the unfortunate Potts family to unravel, for the new Internet cafe to open.... As in *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali is unsparing in chronicling the wasted time and sad unrealized expectations of many of her characters, but ultimately she is generous and gracious enough to show multiple shades of even her most sad or foolish characters, giving us some realistic hope for possibilities of change. Simon and Schuster, \$24, 0743293037.



The new anthology **My Sister, Guard Your Veil; My Brother, Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices** collects short pieces on Iran and Iranian identity by many familiar voices — *Reading Lolita in Tehran* author Azar Nafisi, filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, *Persepolis* author Marjane Satrapi, actress Shohreh Aghdashloo, and artist Shirin Neshat are some of the better-known contributors. I loved the variety of subjects covered, taken all together they provide a portrait of an incredibly complex country, or probably more realistically, a tiny corner of a portrait. There aren't many anthologies like this. In "Death of a Mannequin," Mehrangiz Kar discusses the disturbing changes undergone by mannequins in store windows starting in 1979 and how they paralleled what was happening to women. For those who loved *Reading Lolita*, one essay in particular is fascinating: "Misreading Kundera in Tehran" by former Nafisi student Naghmeh Zarbafian. She explores state censorship of a novel, and how deeply it changes not only what we're reading but how we read. Beacon Press, \$12, 0807004634.

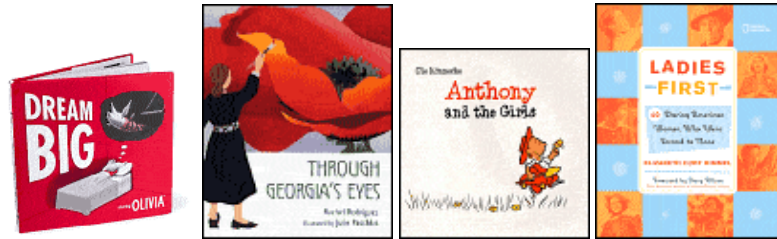


Deborah Eisenberg's collection **Twilight of the Superheroes** contains six longish short stories, all with immediately layered characters, whose histories and relationships with one another feel as complex as real life. Many of the stories contain a character with a slippery hold on sanity, and we watch and hope along with those close to them as they lose and then regain their stability. Most of her characters are some kind of screwed up, but she brings you in so close to them (I can't believe how much she made me feel for the neurotic, nitpicking, hilarious Otto in "Some Other, Better Otto"), that you stay right there with them. Her characters argue passionately about language and her families are deeply invested in their lifetimes of misunderstanding one another. Funny, sad, and rewarding. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$23.00, 0374299412.



For the Kids

Recommendations from Linda Bubon

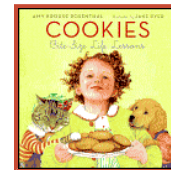


For children and adults, anyone graduating, or someone who just needs to cheer up, **Dream Big: Starring Olivia** by Ian Falconer is a winner. I might just keep one of these 6" by 6" gems in my purse for inspiration. Wonderfully well-chosen quotes accompany the preschool diva: "You can have whatever you want if you dress for it" (Edith Head); "Sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast" (Lewis Carroll); "When in doubt, wear red" (Bill Blass); and the final one, "I am just too much" (Bette Davis). If anyone on the planet has yet to discern that Ian Falconer is a delightful gay man, this may give them a clue. Andrews McMeel, \$9.95, 0740758187.

Writer Rachel Rodriguez and artist Julie Paschkis capture perfectly the wonder and magic of Georgia O'Keeffe's life and art in **Through Georgia's Eyes**. In language that even a 4 or 5-year old could understand, Rodriguez makes clear that it is a hunger for the "Faraway" and a way of seeing the world around her that make an artist. The paintings are beautiful, reminiscent of O'Keeffe's most famous work, and made me long to see the big canvases up close once again. An enchanting and personal introduction to an American icon. Henry Holt, \$16.95, 0805077405.

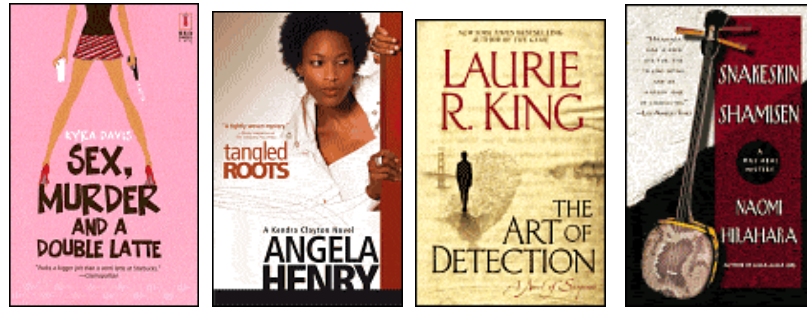
I'd like to have a little chat with Ole Konnecke, the creator of **Anthony and the Girls**, clearly a wise man. Charmingly simple drawings and equally simple sentences show a little boy in the sandbox trying to get the two happily playing girls to notice him. All his macho tricks fail to get them to turn their heads. But when he falls down and cries, the girls give him a cookie and invite him to play. Socialization 101. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$15, 0374303762.

Amy Krouse Rosenthal breaks down the complexity of civilizing values (fair and unfair, greedy and generous, proud and modest) to a child's level of understanding in **Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons**, beautifully illustrated by Jane Dyer. Amy, a Chicago treasure, has always thought way outside the box, and it pays off wonderfully in using cookies – the making, eating, and sharing of them — to teach children (and the rest of us) what's truly important in life. HarperCollins, \$13.99, 0060580828.



There have been other books like **Ladies First: 40 Daring American Women Who Were Second to None**, by Elizabeth Cody Kimmel, for children in the 8-14 range, but as far as I'm concerned there are still too few. This collection of short biographies with photographs focuses on the "daring," and along with the usual suspects (Jane Addams, Nellie Bly, Gertrude Ederle), there is Victoria Murden, born in 1963, and the first woman to ROW across the Atlantic, Stacy Allison, born in 1958, and the first woman to climb Mount Everest, and Brenda Berkman, born in 1951, and the first woman to challenge the ban on women in the Fire Department in New York City. Now here's a great present for that 8th grade graduation. National Geographic, \$18.95, 0792253930.





These days it isn't enough for a cozy mystery to be well-written, character-driven, and relatively non-violent. Judging from the pile of paperbacks next to my computer, every cozy mystery has to have a gimmick, no matter how absurd. Not only are there all kinds of specialty mysteries ("an antique lover's mystery," "a tea lover's mystery," etc.), many feature recipes and other craft-y and self-help tips. On just one day, going through about two dozen paperback cozies, I encountered a pet-sitter mystery, a garden mystery including gardening tips, a candlemaking mystery with, of course, candlemaking tips, a "bath and body mystery" (includes beauty and spa tips!), and a new entry in Ann Waldron's Princeton series, *A Rare Murder in Princeton*, with recipes included. (Why, I wonder? It's a Princeton series, not a cooking series.) It's enough to drive a girl to chick-lit mysteries! And it did.

In spite of the ominous D-word, Harley Jane Kozak's **Dating Is Murder** (\$12.95, Broadway, 0767921240) is not a catalogue of romantic misadventures. Rather, Wollie (short for Wollstonecraft) Shelley is having her fifteen minutes of fame on a particularly taste-free reality show called "Biological Clock," where the audience votes on which couple would make the best parents. An intern from the show, a sweet German au pair named Annika, is missing, and Wollie sets out to find her. If not exactly substantive, **Dating is Murder** is not entirely fluffy, either. Wollie copes with her mentally ill brother and her mother — a refugee from the Sixties who lives in an ashram — while solving a well-plotted, surprising mystery. Kozak's first mystery was **Dating Dead Men** (\$12.95, Broadway, 0767921232).

Sex, Murder and a Double Latte by Kyra Davis (\$12.95, Red Dress Ink, 0373895801), newly out in paperback, features Bay Area mystery writer Sophie Katz, half African-American and half Jewish. Disturbed by an apparent break-in in her apartment, Sophie soon realizes that someone is acting out scenes from her books. Of course there is a romantic interest (a sexy Russian who is also a suspect) and the requisite gay hairdresser friend, as well as girlfriends from central casting. This may be a little too frothy — more a cappuccino than a latte — but in any case, it serves as a nice pick-me-up. Advance reviews of Davis' new hardcover, **Passion, Betrayal and Killer Highlights** (\$21.95 Red Dress Ink, 037389578X), indicate that it's just as much fun.

Angela Henry is the founder of MystNoir (www.mystnoir.com), a website dedicated to mysteries "written by or featuring African-Americans."; (Check it out for info on the 11th Annual Black Mystery Writers' Conference in Oakland May 20.) Henry has just published her second mystery featuring Kendra Clayton, a twenty-eight-year-old GED instructor who still lives in her hometown of Willow, Ohio and helps out at her uncle's restaurant. Kendra debuted in **The Company You Keep** (\$6.99, BET, 1583147608), in which her best friend's cheating boyfriend is murdered. In **Tangled Roots** (\$13.95 BET, 1583146083), one of Kendra's favorite GED students is suspected of murder.

Laurie R. King is really at the top of her game — witness the last few Russell/Holmes mysteries. The latest, **Locked Rooms** (\$6.99, Bantam, 0553583417), is now out in paper. (See MBW #3.) But it's been a long time since we've seen anything in King's other series, featuring present-day SFPD detective Kate Martinelli. (Martinelli is a great character; it's a bonus that she also happens to be a lesbian.) Now we have a new Martinelli novel, **The Art of Detection** (\$24.00, Bantam, 0553804537). In this novel, the victim, Philip Gilbert, is found dead in his apartment, which he has made into

an exact replica of Holmes' famous rooms at 221B Baker Street. This is from the Bantam jacket copy:

Philip Gilbert was a true Holmes fanatic, from his antiquated décor to his vintage wardrobe. And no mere fan of fiction's greatest detective, but a leading expert with a collection of priceless memorabilia — a collection some would kill for. And perhaps someone did: In his collection is a century-old manuscript purportedly written by Holmes himself — that eerily echoes details of Gilbert's own murder.

Some months ago, King announced in her newsletter that this new book would tie together the two series, and it is now becoming clear how she will do that.

What Bantam — and King — don't tell you is that **The Art of Detection** is based on a true story! In 2004, a Sherlockian scholar named Richard L. Green was found dead at his home in Britain, which he had transformed into a veritable Sherlock Holmes museum, completely matching 221B Baker Street in every detail. Green was president of the Sherlock Holmes Organization and involved in a bitter rivalry with other Holmes scholars. It is still not clear whether his death was suicide or murder. (Fans of *CSI* may remember that an episode of that TV show was also based on this real-life event. I can't wait to see what King does with it.)

Betty Webb's socially conscious series featuring private eye Lena Jones is set in Scottsdale, Arizona, which also happens to be the home of her publisher, Poisoned Pen Press. In **Desert Shadows** (\$14.95, 159058273X), a right wing publisher is murdered at the Southwestern Book Publishers' Expo. In the new hardcover, **Desert Run** (\$24.95, 1590582349), Lena is working on a documentary film about a German POW camp in Scottsdale in 1944. The mystery of Lena's own origins — she was abandoned at the age of four and grew up in foster care — is perhaps the most compelling mystery of all.



Briefly Noted

I just recently discovered Naomi Hirahara's wonderful mysteries featuring elderly Japanese American gardener Mas Arai. Hirahara's latest is **Snakeskin Shamisen** (0385339615). Her two previous books, **Summer of the Big Bachi** (0385337590) and **Gasa Gasa Girl** (0385337604) are reviewed in [MBW#5](#) (all \$12, Delta).

Now in Paper

Sara Paretsky's latest in her classic — and very feminist — private eye series featuring V. I. Warshawski, **Fire Sale** (\$9.99, Signet, 045121899X).

Dead Run by mother-daughter team P.J. Tracy (\$7.99, Signet, 0451218159) is the latest in a very nifty series of fast-moving thrillers. The ensemble cast includes a number of intriguing and diverse women characters, including some beautiful big women and some lesbians. If you've never read Tracy, start with the first in the series, **Monkeewrench** (\$6.99, Signet, 045121157X).



That's it! See you next issue.

In the meantime, tell your friends they can give **More Books for Women** or **The Lesbian Edition** a try at www.BooksToWatchOutFor.com/TRIAL where they can sign up for a three month, trial subscription to any of the BTWOF book reviews.

Yours in spreading the words,

Carol Seajay
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