



In this issue...

- [Find of the Issue](#)
- [Cartoonists To Watch Out For](#)
- [Fiction](#)
- [Back in Print](#)
- [Poetry](#)
- [For the Dyke Who Has Everything](#)
- [What They Are Reading](#)
- [The Crime Scene](#)
- [Interview: Firebrand Books](#)
- [News](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [Printer-friendly version](#)

The Lesbian Edition

October/November 2003

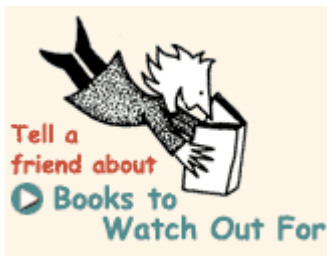
Volume 1 Number 2

Issue #2! At last!

Thanks for your patience as we learn our way into hi-tech publishing! Please accept my apologies for the delay in getting this was-supposed-to-be-October issue to you. It took a lot longer than we'd planned to resolve some of the...a...um...*interesting* technical challenges that came up along the way.

But resolved they are, and the next issue will get to you in a much more timely manner. Please keep the faith: you *will* receive all 12 issues of your subscription year. Either we will publish some catch up issues or we'll extend your subscription the appropriate number of months. If you didn't receive the first issue, you can read it (and the first issue of *The Gay Men's Edition*) on the web site at www.BooksToWatchOutFor.com.

Yours in spreading the words,
Carol Seajay



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.

The Lesbian Edition

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.

- » [Click here to subscribe.](#)
- » [Click here for more info.](#)
- » [Click here to tell a friend about the Lesbian Edition.](#)

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.

- » [Click here to subscribe.](#)
- » [Click here for more info.](#)
- » [Click here to tell a friend](#)

Find of the Issue

It's the immediacy of Lucy Jane Bledsoe's writing that makes me want to brush aside any interfering distractions (including reality) that stand between me and the next chapter. She writes brilliantly of the out-of-doors, bringing me vicarious pleasure as her characters tromp off to adventures I've dreamed up but probably won't get to this time around. And then there's that charming quality of good-intentions-gone-awry that inhabits her best characters and, yes, their political visions.

This Wild Silence is the tale of two sisters, good friends, to be sure, but also bound together by a guilty childhood secret as they work out adult lives. Liz is an ecologist married to her high school sweetheart; Christine, an inner city doctor who never quite manages to slide into commitment with any of the women she's loved. But secrets are never static and, with time and silence, they have a way of carving out new niches in their keepers' psyches. This secret starts when their little brother, Timothy, disappears one morning when the girls are supposed to be watching him. The story unfolds so exquisitely that I hesitate to add any detail lest I interfere with your reading pleasure. Let me just add that, perhaps because I spent much of my youth watching my younger sister and brother, fiction about missing siblings was definitely not on my shortlist. But **This Wild Silence** haunted me – not because of the missing child, but because of the layering. It wasn't just that I couldn't put it down – it was the way my mind kept returning to explore another reflection of a nuance – that put **This Wild Silence** on my favorites list.



about the Gay Men's Edition.

More Books for Women

will launch in 2004.

» [Click here](#) to be notified when it launches.

.....

Q. How does BTWOF define "a lesbian book?"

A. We think that any book that belongs to a lesbian is a lesbian book, just as any bike that belongs to a girl is "a girl's bike."

BTWOF: The Lesbian Edition

covers a wide range of books likely to be of interest to our readers as well as books with lesbian content and books by lesbian writers.

.....

Advertising & Sponsorships

BTWOF is financed by subscriptions, rather than advertising or book sales. Publishers and individuals who wish to help launch BTWOF are invited to sponsor any of the first 12 issues. Write to [Mozelle Mathews](#) for sponsorship information.

.....

Housekeeping

If you want to change your BTWOF email address or other contact information, [click here](#) to update:

- » your subscriber profile
- » whatever has changed.



You might recall Bledsoe's first novel, **Working Parts**, that won an American Library Association Award for Literature for its groundbreaking look at literacy in one dyke's life, or her short story collection, **Sweat**, which was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award. She also edited books for newly literate adults and writes novels for the middle school crew. (I'd give **Hoop Girlz**, which makes room in the world for girls who want to play but who aren't ever going to be stars, to any middle-schooler I knew.). If you have preteens on your list, you might also want to check out Bledsoe's **The Antarctic Scoop** (just off press), **Tracks in the Snow**, **The Big Bike Race**, and **Cougar Canyon**, and watch for out for her forthcoming **How to Survive in Antarctica**.

Antarctica? Yes. Bledsoe has twice won the National Science Foundation's Artists & Writers in Antarctica Fellowship – she's there now. And she also just gave a dynamite keynote at the Lambda Literary Festival in Provincetown in which she re-eroticized the passions of flannel-shirted dykes from the 70s. No mean feat in that mostly-male crowd, I gotta say. Look for it in the next issue of *The Lambda Book Report* or [click here](#) to read a brief excerpt.

This Wild Silence, \$13.95, Alyson Publications; **Working Parts**, \$12.00, Seal Press; **Sweat**, \$10.95, Seal Press. The middle school titles are all from Holiday House at \$16.95 each. **Tracks in the Snow** is also available in paper from Avon at \$3.95.

You can read excerpts from any of Lucy's books at www.lucyjanebledsoe.com/.

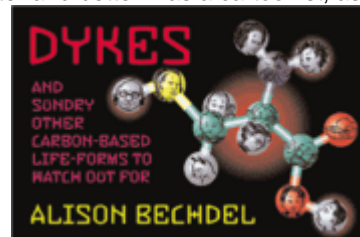
.....

[back to top](#)

Cartoonists to Watch Out For

Four out of five lesbians stop dead in their tracks when you hand them a postcard with an Alison Bechdel cartoon on it. And they won't talk to you, look at you, or brook any interruptions until they've finished reading it, thank-you very much! Or at least that was my experience passing out Books To Watch Out For promotional postcards* with Alison Bechdel drawings on them at the [Michigan Women's Music Festival](#). If, as a lesbian community, we have consensus about anything, it's that we love Alison Bechdel's vision of our wonderfully complex, contradictory, extended community.

Bechdel is brilliant. **Dykes and Sundry Other Carbon-Based Life-Forms To Watch Out For** – her tenth collection – celebrates the strip's twentieth (!) anniversary with a brief retrospective, and then picks up with Toni and Clarice's mid-relationship crisis and runs through to the closing of Madwimmin Books. Bechdel just gets better and better – as a cartoonist, as a writer, and as a commentator. I think she's one of the best cartoon-strip writers publishing. It's too bad that our culture is still so lesbi-phobic that more non-lesbians don't get to read her. She captures us at our subversive best but she doesn't let us get away with much, either. I'm always amazed (and thankful) for the insights I find when I go back and reread strips in the book form. Do yourself a favor, in these trying times, and indulge in **Dykes and Sundry Other Carbon-Based Life-Forms**, even if you think you saw all the strips as they were published. You'll be glad you did. \$13.95, Alyson Publications.



And there's more good news: the new, recently reborn Firebrand Books (see our [interview](#), later this issue) has reprinted all nine of the previous Dykes To Watch Out For books. Check out the new covers [here](#). But, to kvetch a little bit, I keep wondering where all the Straight Eyes for the Lesbian Humor can be and if it's going to take twenty more years for television to do anything lesbian that's as remotely complex and interesting as Dykes to Watch Out For. Straight people, and gay men, after all, like to laugh out loud, too. But that's going to take even longer than the Sodomy decision. Meanwhile you

can catch up with the current strips via Alison's website (www.DykesToWatchOutFor.com) while you're waiting for good lesbian TV to happen. Or read an [interview](#) with Alison at http://www.alyson.com/html/dykes_sundry/dykesinterview.html

* Yes, *of course* I asked Alison before I launched a publication with a name that bounces off our collective enjoyment of her series. Alison was one of the first people I called when I decided to launch BTWOF. She loved the concept, blessed my idea for the name, and even drew some panels I could use to promote it. They made great postcards – perfect for mailing on to friends you want to know about BTWOF. Send a long, self-addressed, stamped envelope for a set of 10 to send to your friends: BTWOF, PO Box 882554, San Francisco CA 94188.

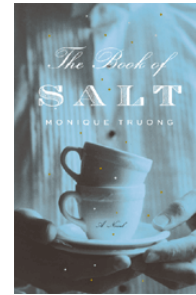


[back to top](#)

Fiction

Monique Truong's excellent **The Book of Salt** was inspired by a line from the *Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* about an "Indochinese" who cooked for Toklas and Gertrude Stein. "[He] came to us through an advertisement that I had, in desperation, put in the newspaper....," was the line that captured Truong's imagination.

In **Salt** Truong offers us another take on expatriates in Paris – this one from a sojourner from Viet Nam, equally gay, though perhaps in different ways, who makes his way by cooking, by observing, by remembering (and, at times, by declining to remember), and by standing for himself, however silently, in the face of the invisibility of servants. Binh sees everything ("A kiss freely given is a wonder to watch, even if it is being seen through the slit of a partially closed door.") but his own life is harder for Binh to untangle: the (sometimes) Sweet Sunday Man, The Man on the Bridge (AKA Ho Chi Minh) who makes Binh visible again (however briefly), the memories and absence of home, and the necessity of finding a way through the loneliness of unchosen solitude. Binh's (and Truong's) versions are at least as accurate as anything Stein wrote about the era. It's an exquisitely written novel that begs to be read aloud: the sentences are as savory as the food Binh prepares.



Is **The Book of Salt** a lesbian novel? Perhaps not by some definitions: author's identity, main character, theme or sex scenes. But if you're interested in truth you can use in your own life, in vision that will sustain you through the migrations inherent in most lesbian lives, or in just a more accurate mirror reflecting lesbian lives, this one is for you. \$24.00 Houghton Mifflin.

To read [an interview](#) with Monique Truong and to pursue the details of Ho Chi Minh's bit part in the novel, go to http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/booksellers/press_release/truong/#questions

To read the [opening chapter](#):

<http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/catalog/titledetail.cfm?textType=excerpt&titleNumber=688416>



Young Marci Cruz wants God to do two things: change her into a boy and get rid of her father. God isn't listening, but Carla Trujillo is, and **What Night Brings** is what we get when a dead serious feminist writer with a throw-your-head-back-and-laugh sense of humor listens in on a little girl's prayers: an indomitable heroine, a struggle to find and maintain an identity against a perilous home life and an incomprehensible Church, and an unending passion for Raquel, the teenage beauty next door. All wrapped up in a funny, sweet, poignant look at surviving – and sometimes loving – our families of origin.

Trujillo is better known for her ground-breaking anthologies, the Vanguard- and Lammy-winning *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* and *Living Chicana Theory*. Thank the muse, she's now writing fiction, too! \$15.95, Curbstone Press.

"Heartbreaking and hilarious, beautifully told, by a wise and wise-cracking young girl."

–Sandra Cisneros

"On the must-read-list right up there beside Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, and Christina Garcia.... A page-turner that lingers..."

–Margaret Randall

To read an interview with Carla Trujillo about writing this feisty heroine, go to <http://www.curbstone.org/ainterview.cfm?AuthID=129>

Falling in love is easy – it's breaking up that's hard to do. But somehow we have a slew of romances but only a few books about navigating the aftermath. In **Ginger's Fire** Maureen Brady gives us a tale of reconstruction as Ginger finds her way past the fire that both destroys the old farmhouse she and her partner had restored by hand and reveals that little has been left standing in her relationship. Dishonesty, Ginger finds, is as malevolent as fire, and possibly more difficult to survive. But survive it she does, rebuilding desire, passion, her own inner fire, and a life she truly wants. **Ginger's Fire** carries echoes of Brady's fierce earlier novels, *Folly* and *Give Me Your Good Ear*, and Adrienne Rich's essay, "Women and Honor." \$14.95, Alice Street Editions/Harrington Park Press.



"Rewarding.... Brady is a mesmerizing writer who parses the messy complexities of fidelity, communication, dependence, and trauma with poignant precision and reflective wisdom."

–Q Syndicate Book Marks



Lydia Kwa also explores grieving – and displacement and the impact of suicide on those left behind – in **This Place Called Absence**, a novel that moves between Vancouver and Singapore as it explores the lives, loves, and griefs of four remarkable women: Wu Lan, a successful Vancouver psychologist who is unexpectedly devastated by her father's death – and although she won't admit it, by the recent, bad ending of her long-term relationship; Wu Lan's mother, also haunted by her husband's unruly ghost; Ah Choi, who was sold into prostitution by her family a century earlier; and Chat Mui, a courageous young girl (and perhaps Wu Lan's alter ego? Or possibly her grandmother?) who ran away from a life of village slavery, only to end up trapped in a bordello where she meets and falls in love with Ah Choi and tries to build a world where they can love, if not live.

Exquisitely written, although, like Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, it takes a little letting go to enjoy fully enjoy the rich layering of time and place and experience. My thanks to Suzanne Corson, of [Boadecia's Books](#), for putting this book in my hands. Originally published in Canada by Turnstone (\$C15.95), published in the U. S. by Kensington, \$14.



[back to top](#)

Back in Print: *Beyond the Pale*

I've lived what some people would call a risky life, taking care of myself, but sometimes putting passions above practical matters. But I do keep one kind of insurance policy intact: I always keep at least one coveted and excellent book unread to see me through emergencies of the soul. I kept Elana Dykewomon's ***Beyond the Pale*** as that insurance policy for three long years and, sure enough, when that dark night came, my excellent choice of an "insurance book" gave me vision, warmth, tenderness, passion, politic, perspective, and that wonderful affirmation that we are, in fact and in history, everywhere. All of that *plus* just being an excellent read. So it's with great delight that I report to all of you who have regretted that it's been out of print for the last few years, and to all of you who have never had the pleasure of reading it, that ***Beyond the Pale*** is back in print. Hooray!



"What a lucky thing for us that we have a second chance to acquaint ourselves with the remarkable Chava: survivor of a pogrom, and, later, suffragette, lesbian, labor activist, and East Side New York socialist... Dykewomon's great skill lies in her ability to stitch fragments of history, poetry, and polemic into whole cloth."

-Georgia Straight

-And it won a Lammy, a Ferro-Grumley Award, and was a finalist for the American Library Association's G/L/B Book Award when it was originally published by Press Gang in 1997.

"As I wrote this book," Elana writes in the new preface, "I realized I was writing our ancestors into being: the documented ones, those Progressive Era settlement-house and labor visionaries; the imagined ones, the women who left no record. All these women fought for sexual, economic and racial justice before we were born."

"History is cyclical," she continues, "The women of the Progressive Era were as politically sophisticated and effective as we have ever been... I envy them their strikes on every street corner, their late night debates on the merits of socialism over anarcho-syndicalism, their passion."

Elana may envy them, but she gives them to us as fully realized, complex characters in ***Beyond the Pale***. She researched this book for a good decade and we are the lucky beneficiaries. During that time she came to believe that inside each woman's story is another woman's story, so we get not only the tale of the working girl in the turn-of-the-century sweatshops (Chava) and the girl she loved (Rose), we get the story of how Chava got to New York, and where she came from. And her mother's story and, even, the story of the midwife who helped her into the world (Gutke), and a bit of the story of the woman the midwife loved (Dovida), as well. My wild hope is that, this time around, ***Beyond the Pale*** will get the mainstream awards and recognition it deserves. \$15.95, Raincoast Books.

To read a brief excerpt from ***Beyond the Pale***

<http://www.dykewomon.org/excerpts.htm>

And, should you find yourself wanting to know more about the women of these passionate times, pick up a copy of *Washington Post* journalist David Von Drehle's excellent ***Triangle: The Fire That Changed America***. This "harrowing yet compulsively readable" book portrays the major events – the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and the 40,000-strong shirtwaist workers' strike – and the strike's inherent feminism and the incredible support from the breadth of the women's community from the very poor to the very rich (including lovers Anne Morgan and Elizabeth Marbury). And he also describes how public fury about the fire transformed both local and national politics and gave rise to successful urban liberalism that still impacts our lives. Who knew that part of the story? In these, often discouraging, times it's inspiring to read about the long-range effect of social justice work. ***Triangle*** is a fascinating read (though if I had it to do over again, I'd skip over some of

the description of the fire – those images are already vivid enough in my mind.) \$25, Atlantic Monthly Press.

And for those of us who've been wondering what else Elana Dykewomon has been writing since **Beyond the Pale**, her new collection, **Moon Creek Road** (published by Spinsters Ink last Spring), offers insights into the lives of a circle of friends and lovers (and ex's) via a loosely linked set of short stories and a (very) short play. Most of the stories are as driven by musings as by plot. Themes that appear in one story echo and expand in another as Elana documents the issues that mark the lives of aging politicians: passion and social justice, staying politically responsible, the interactions of peace work and high blood pressure, the long-term health impact of "psychiatric" drugs imposed in youth, families and love (and lack thereof), and finding a place to live the lives we've built for ourselves over the decades. \$14, Spinsters Ink.



[back to top](#)

Poetry

In this month's Gay Men's Edition of BTWOF, Richard Labonte writes that we should all read more poetry. Taking that to heart, I picked up Minnie Bruce Pratt's **The Dirt She Ate**, Calyx Books' **A Fierce Brightness**, and the reprint of Adrienne Rich's **What is Found There**.



Minnie Bruce's work is as lyrical – and readable – as she is political. Her work always reflects her commitment to anti-racist work, to cultural diversity, to gender diversity, and to ending oppression for all of us. **The Dirt She Ate** includes thirteen new poems and collects work from her earlier books, *The Sound of One Fork*, *We Say We Love Each Other*, *Crime Against Nature*, and *Walking Back Up Depot Street*. \$12.95, University of Pittsburgh Press.

*"If you read only one book of poetry this year, **The Dirt She Ate** should be it."*

–Joy Parks

Calyx Journal, which has been publishing since 1976, is much less famous than it should be, perhaps because it is always publishing women writers and artists (like Barbara Kingsolver, Nobel Laureate Wislawa Szymborska, and Freida Kahlo) long before the mainstream has heard of them. **A Fierce Brightness**, edited by Margarita Donnelly, Beverly McFarland, and Micki Reaman, collects 101 poems from among the 3500 women whose work has been published in *Calyx* over the years. \$14.95, [Calyx Books](#).



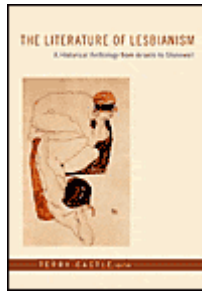
Or check out the reprint of Adrienne Rich's **What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics**. This new edition includes a new preface and Rich's post 9/11 essay, "Six Meditations in Place of a Lecture." \$14.95, Norton.



[back to top](#)

For the Lesbian Who Has Everything

Or at least every book known to lesbian-kind, consider this when you're making your holiday and birthday gift-giving lists: Terry Castle's **The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall**.



Weighing in at a good five pounds and 1100 oversized pages, it explores the very “idea of lesbianism” in Western literature. Castle begins in the early Renaissance with the rediscovery of the writers of antiquity – including the lesbian images of Sappho, Ovid, Martial, and Juvenal – and then charts how these images helped shape the concept of lesbianism at that time, and how that concept has been transformed, transmitted, and embellished over the last five centuries. It turns out that, when all is said and done (and collected in one place) lesbianism is an almost common, hardly forbidden, literary theme.

The images and representations Castle has collected include the good, the bad, and the truly vicious and ugly. Each selection comes with an introduction that places the work and the writer in the context of their times and other writing. And, literary gossip maven that I am, I have to admit that I found dipping into the various introductions to be even more fun than reading some of the selections.

More than anything else, **The Lit of Lesbianism** reminds me of seeing, back in the mid-seventies, Tee Corinne’s slide show “Erotic Images of Lesbians in the Fine Arts.” (Which, I cannot believe, still has not yet been published in book form.) The slide show collected images of lesbians from all around the world and across the centuries to document that lesbians have truly been everywhere, always. It was quite a mind-opener for many people. Castle’s book does the same thing with literature.

It’s hard to decide what’s most amazing: the astonishing (and often unpredictable) range of attitudes, the range of writers included, or the wonderful works from our fine sister, Anon, many of which are published here for the first time. Writers range from Shakespeare, Aphra Behn, the King James Bible, and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz through to Angelina Weld Grimke, Nella Larson (thank you!), Helen Hull, and the rest of the usual suspects. It’s easy to see why it took Castle a couple of decades to put this work together.

It’s a great gift for homophobes, too. If they won’t read it, just throw it at them – maybe it will knock some sense into their heads. \$45, Columbia University Press.



[back to top](#)

What They're Reading at Charis Books & More

Each issue BTWOF asks the staff at a different women's bookstore what they're reading and what they're loving. This issue we asked the gals at Charis Books in Atlanta. Charis celebrated 29 years on November 1. Congratulations and thanks to all of the women who have made Charis such a wonderful place of refuge and hope – and books – over the years.



Sara Luce Look

And Then They Were Nuns by Susan Lombardi and **Elegant Gathering of White Snows** by Kris Radish – I read these books back to back and really

enjoyed both of them. Both are about women's community and friendship and have some lesbian content. And both of them seem a little unbelievable, but.... **Elegant Gathering** was first published by Spinsters Ink and was re-published by the big boys (in this case Bantam) and is the story of eight women who one day just start walking and don't stop – you learn all about their lives and relationships. **And Then They Were Nuns** is Firebrand Books' first new book in a long time. (Yeah!) It tells the story of a community of nuns who, over 35 years, have broken most ties with the church and are re-making their religious and communal lives. **Nuns**, \$14.95, Firebrand; **Elegant Gathering**, \$10.00, Bantam.

Kissing Kate by Lauren Myracle – A young adult coming-out lesbian novel set in Atlanta (and Lissa, the main character does make it into Charis Books!) It's well done and happily unpredictable. \$16.99, Dutton/Penguin.

Godspeed by Lynn Breedlove – Jim is a butch bike messenger and speedfreak who is suddenly faced with an ultimatum by her girlfriend: clean up or get out. Unable to kick her drug habit, Jim ends up unemployed and alone. When she finally lands a job as a band roadie, she takes off for New York from San Francisco and finally starts to clean up. But even after changing her ways, Jim still finds herself dissatisfied and in desperate search of the ultimate rush. \$12.95, St. Martin's Press.

Linda Bryant

Daughter, asha bandele's book, just knocked me out. The subject is painful: police brutality, the silences between mothers and daughters, the ache of living daily with racism and/or unrealistic religious expectations. Gritty and real and yet somehow beautiful and redemptive. Once I read it, I contacted asha about doing an event for Charis, which she readily agreed to do. We talked about her earlier memoir, **The Prisoner's Wife**, and asha said she had heard from many lesbian friends how important her story has been to them because it is a love story from the margins – a love that is not socially acceptable or encouraged by the world we live in – yet is deep and true. One of the lovely things about **Daughter** is the ultimate belief in the healing power of telling/writing/speaking our stories to one another and to the world. If you love poetry, don't miss asha's in **Absence in the Palms of My Hands**. **Daughter**, \$23.00, Scribner; **Prisoner's Wife**, \$12.95, Washington Square Press/Pocket; **Absence**, \$12.00, Writers and Readers.

Night Diving by Michelene Esposito is one of the new Spinster's offerings and it is a gem. Losing everything in the classic lesbian break-up, ("I thought we owned that business together"), Rose returns to her growing up home to honor her grandmother's death. There she re-encounters her first love, so we get the coming-out story part of her life as she remembers those young, confusing days. This is more than a coming-out story, though, because both Rose and her early love, Jessie, have been through so much that has shaped them into the women they are now – women wondering what love is and whether or not it is worth the risk. \$14, Spinsters Ink.

Maxine Hong Kingston's **The Fifth Book of Peace** is full of wisdom. Beginning with the loss of her novel-in-progress to the Oakland fires, the book moves into a recreation of that novel. Although the fictional section did not exactly work for me, I was so captivated by the book that I stayed with it and then reached the section that really moved me where Maxine invites veterans of war to join her in a writing workshop experiment that lasts for years. I loved the spirit of mindfulness that she used as the structure of the workshops. I highlighted a lot of this section. She teaches the vets (and her readers) the power of telling your story, the possibility of forgiveness between people and within the self, the lightness of the page that now holds one's painful story. \$26, Knopf/Random House.

Leah Denney

Light, Coming Back by Ann Wadsworth – This story is incredibly captivating! Mercedes Medina is dealing with a husband on the brink of death and then she meets Lennie, a younger woman who turns Mercedes' life around. I couldn't put this book down! \$13.95, Alyson Publications.

Small Wonder by Barbara Kingsolver – I thoroughly enjoy reading Barbara Kingsolver's essays. She grabs my attention with her realness. In these essays she writes about gardening, sustainability, motherhood, and the

future of our nation. Absolutely timely! \$12.95, Harper/ Perennial.

Mia Mingus

No Logo by Naomi Klein – Naomi Klein's first book, **No Logo**, is a strong, insightful, and informative take on the phenomenon of globalization, as well as the new "branded world." In it Klein connects advertising, our irrational attachments to brands, sweatshops, and the rise of the "anti-corporate" movement. It will change the way you look at your impact on the world and the part we all play in global inequality. \$15, Picador USA

Hotel World by Ali Smith – **Hotel World** is a dizzying novel about life, death, and the strange, quirky, little moments in between. As the story begins, a teenaged chambermaid has fallen to her death in a hotel and her restless ghost still drifts about the world trying to remember her life. She is one of five women readers will meet in one crazy night in this witty and, at times, surprisingly touching novel. (Shortlisted for the 2001 Orange Prize.) \$12.95, Anchor/Doubleday.

Fiona Lewis

Sand in My Bra edited by Jennifer Leo – Lose your panties, cookies, and fear of a fat ass in this outrageous collection of women's travel stories. Ellen Degeneres, Anne Lamott, Sandra Tsing Loh, and an assortment of other funny women contribute their often irreverent wit and travel wisdom to make this book a traveler's must-read, even if the only traveling you do is between the refrigerator and the couch. \$14.95, Travelers' Tales.

Bitches, Bimbos, and Ballbreakers: The Guerrilla Girls' Illustrated Guide to Female Stereotypes – The Guerrilla Girls, the anonymous group of right-on feminists who wear gorilla masks in public, strike again. This time with a fun (and fact-filled) look at all the ways that women have been called out of their name throughout the ages – pointing at the media as the main culprit in perpetuating these stereotypes. This book challenges us to look critically at said stereotypes and fight the hell out of them. To find out more, check out <http://www.guerillagirls.com>. \$20, Penguin.

Skippyjon Jones by Judith Byron Schachner – If you have children who love to be read to or even if you just happen to know some marvelously immature adults, this book is a must-have. The writer and illustrator used her own Siamese kitten, Skippy, as the inspiration for this captivating and (yes) hilarious children's book. Watch cute kitty Skippyjon Jones as he takes on the persona of the heroic Chihuahua Skippito and save a group of colorful dogs from a bothersome bumblebee. Involves handclapping and singing.... \$15.99, Dutton.

Fifth Born by Zelda Lockhart – To look beyond the beautiful and poignant image on the cover of this marvelous novel and dip into its pages to the stirring and graceful prose within is an experience not to be missed. This is the story of Odessa Blackburn, fifth-born and much-abused child, who, in the course of two hundred brilliant pages, becomes forged in the crucible of incest, family secrets, and murderous jealousies. Fantastic. \$13, Washington Square Press/Pocket.

Many thanks to Sara Look and to all the women at Charis for their help with this column and for all the work they do to support our communities. Check out the Charis web site at www.charisbooksandmore.com or read about more of their [favorite books](#).

You'll find all the women's bookstores at www.litwomen.org/WIP/stores.html.



The Crime Scene

By Nan Cinnater

Let's face it. Lesbian mysteries have a bad rep. Lesbian mysteries so proliferated in the Eighties and Nineties, and so many of them were mediocre girl-meets-girl romances, that some of you may have given up on the whole genre. Don't! Recently a friend of mine, whose taste runs to critically acclaimed international fiction, asked me if there was anything new

and good in lesbian fiction. I recommended a couple of lesbian mysteries! (See the books by Nicola Griffith and Elizabeth Woodcraft below.) Like the truth, the good stuff is out there, and it's our job to help you find it.

Trans-genre readers already know what a great writer Nicola Griffith is. She has won all the major science fiction awards, and lives in the U.S. courtesy of a special green card issued to artists who are considered an asset to this country. A few years ago, Griffith entered deeply *noir* territory with her non-SF thriller **The Blue Place** (\$13.00, Avon). *The Blue Place* introduced Atlanta super-cop Aud Torvingen, a transplanted Norwegian with lethal instincts and the martial arts skills to back them up. The sequel, **Stay** (\$12.95, Vintage), may be the finest lesbian *noir* novel to date. In *Stay*, Aud is rebuilding a cabin in Appalachia, grieving deeply about the outcome of her last case. Her oldest friend seeks her out to help him find his fiancée, who has disappeared. Ultimately, the case leads Aud to a confrontation with evil so great it could destroy her.



Perennial Lambda Award winner Ellen Hart brings back restaurant owner Jane Lawless and her sidekick Cordelia in **Immaculate Midnight** (\$13.95, St. Martin's Press/Minotaur). Hart is the lesbian answer to Agatha Christie, with stylish writing, an emphasis on psychological motivation and, usually, a round-up of a limited number of suspects. However, *Midnight* deals with a serial arsonist who commits suicide in jail but whose methods live on – which may indicate a grittier, more forensic approach than usual. Hart also writes a cosy non-lesbian series featuring food critic Sophie Greenway, the latest of which is **Death on a Silver Platter** (\$6.99, Fawcett).



At the Lambda Literary Awards this year, **Immaculate Midnight** tied for Best Lesbian Mystery with **Good Bad Woman** by Elizabeth Woodcraft (\$14, Kensington Books). In **Good Bad Woman**, Frankie Richmond – a lesbian barrister with a working-class background and a taste for Sixties soul – tries to hold on to her career and her life while helping out a spacey friend who's wanted by the police. The meandering plot involves a sexy chanteuse, a solicitor (another kind of British lawyer, I can never tell which) who's also Frankie's ex, and Frankie's mom, whose romance with a plastic surgeon is just heating up. The novel picks up suspense, but it's Frankie's witty narrative voice that makes it a great read.

The plot of **Dispatch to Death** by Martha Miller (New Victoria, \$12.95) is equally meandering, but you'll want to read it for its surprisingly textured, down-to-earth portrayal of a middle-aged butch cab driver in a Midwestern city. Trudy Thomas is trying to protect Anita Alvarez, a beautiful El Salvadoran woman who claims to be a political refugee, although the police say she's a drug dealer. Personally, I would have turned in Anita on page 15, but I don't have Trudy's weakness for damsels in distress, misfits of all sorts, or motorcycles, either.

Long term lesbian couple and writing team Jean Marcy (how *do* they do that?) won the Lambda Award a few years ago for **Mommy Deadest** (\$12.95, New Victoria), featuring St. Louis private eye Meg Darcy and her sometimes lover, cop Sarah Lindstrom. Meg and Lindstrom are back in **A Cold Case of Murder** (\$12.95, New Victoria). This is the fourth in the series, which began with **The Cemetery Murders** and **Dead and Blonde**. In the cold case in question, Meg looks for an adoptee's birth mother, only to find that the birth mother was murdered eight years ago.

Lesbians who like twisty suspense and intrigue – as opposed to straightforward whodunits – have been shortchanged for years. They should pounce on **Owl of the Desert** by Ida Swearingen (\$12.95, New Victoria). To avoid the cardinal sin of giving too much information, I'll only tell you what you can glean from the first chapter. Kate Porter is newly out of prison after serving twelve years. Her first contact is with a Kansas Bureau of Investigation agent who helped her turn herself in years ago when she was wanted for bank robbery and murder. The murder was an accident; the robbery was masterminded by Kate's father, leader of a militia group known as the American Patriotic Front.



A few years ago, a Scottish lesbian series by Manda Scott appeared more or less unheralded in the U.S., published in paperback by Bantam. Featuring Glasgow psychiatrist Kellen Stewart, the three books – **Hen's Teeth**, **Night Mares**, and **Stronger than Death** (all \$5.50 from Bantam) – all involve animals and veterinarians. Although the writing is superb, I couldn't take bad things happening to good animals, not to mention the detailed accounts of veterinary procedures. Scott is now back with a critically acclaimed thriller, apparently without lesbian content, called **No Good Deed** (\$5.99, Bantam). After a shootout that leaves one cop dead, Glasgow Detective Inspector Orla McLeod is forced to hide out in the Highlands with nine-year-old Jamie, the only witness to a murder. Equally graphic but without the animals, this beautifully written psychological thriller could be Scott's breakthrough book.



If you miss Sandra Scoppettone's wisecracking New York private eye, you'll want to get to know Sydney Sloane. Wisecracking New Yorker Sydney appears in a snappy, well-plotted series by Randye Lordon, which began with **Brotherly Love** (out of print) and **Sister's Keeper** (\$11.95, St. Martin's Press). Lordon's latest are **Son of a Gun** (\$23.95, St. Martin's Press/Minotaur) and **East of Niece** (\$13.95, St. Martin's Press).

[back to top](#)



Firebrand Books

Interviewing New Publisher Karen Oosterhous

BTWOF caught up with Karen Oosterhous, the new owner of Firebrand Books, at the Michigan Women's Music Festival and had a chance to ask her how she came to own the legendary lesbian and feminist publishing company founded and run by Nancy K. Bereano until 2000. One question led to another so here's BTWOF's first interview:

BTWOF: How did you come to own Firebrand Books?

Karen: My partner and I were sitting at our kitchen table having breakfast one Saturday morning. She was reading *Between The Lines*, our local LGBT paper, and read, aloud – a small note at the bottom of a book review – that Firebrand Books was for sale as part of a bankruptcy proceeding. It was a moment of inspiration and I said, "I'm going to buy it."

On Monday I tracked down David Wilk, the president of the LPC Group, the ailing parent company that owned Firebrand at that time. When I finally got him on the phone, I said, "My name is Karen Oosterhous and I'd like to buy Firebrand Books." He told me that someone else already had a bid in for Firebrand and the other three publishing companies (Papier-Mache Press, Albion Books, and Olmstead Press) LPC owned and said that, to purchase Firebrand, I would need to best the bid for all four companies or get the other bidder to let go of Firebrand.

With the sale less than a month away, I called the leading bidder, Britt Bell of Moyer Bell Publishing, who has since become a friend and mentor. After explaining to him that publishing was my dream and this was my opportunity to make that dream a reality, he graciously stepped aside so that I could bid on Firebrand. Now, let me reiterate: Britt had the deal locked up. He didn't have to give up the opportunity to buy Firebrand, but he did and I will always be grateful.

So now the opportunity to purchase Firebrand was open to me - and any other bidders. It wasn't a walk. The bankruptcy sale was on August 14, 2002. There was competition from some existing publishing companies who wanted to add Firebrand to their portfolios. Fortunately, I was able to out-bid them. The final bill of sale was issued October 8, 2002.

As part of the sale, Firebrand authors were paid all royalties they were owed,

which was a great way to begin our work together.

BTWOF: Are you also a writer?

No. I'm a passionate reader and a friend of writers. Being an editor and publisher is a terrific way to advocate for both writers and readers, bringing them together by producing great literature.

My grandmother was a writer. I've always loved books. When I was a kid my mom worked at a library. I was always happy to see her come through the door at the end of the day - because I love her - but also because she was bringing me new books to devour!

BTWOF: What's your vision for Firebrand?

I want readers to see the Firebrand logo and be confident that it's a great read before they even open the cover. Firebrand will continue to produce award-winning literature that both reflects the values of our readers and opens new worlds for them.

BTWOF: What have you published so far?

And Then They Were Nuns, our first new release, was quite an achievement. It's the kind of high-caliber feminist and lesbian literature Firebrand is known for. It's also seen cross-over success due to its selection as a Book Sense title by the American Booksellers Association. And we re-published all nine Dykes To Watch Out For books with some kickin' new covers.

BTWOF: What's coming up on your publishing agenda?

Dish It Up, Baby! is a fun, smart piece of fiction from a new author - Kristie Helms - who writes about coming of age and coming out as a native Kentuckian making her way in New York City. It should be arriving in bookstores as you read this. We will be publishing a new edition of **The Gilda Stories** with some new tales about Gilda and some commentary from Jewelle Gomez on January 21. In May, we'll publish **Venus of Chalk** by Susan Stinson, the author of *Martha Moody* and *Fat Girl Dances With Rocks*.

BTWOF: What are your goals for Firebrand for the next couple of years?

We want to maintain the quality of our literature and steadily increase the number of books we publish.

BTWOF: Are you accepting new manuscripts?

We are always looking for new works. Guidelines are available on our website www.FirebrandBooks.com.

BTWOF: How do bookstores order your books? How can readers get them?

Individuals can buy Firebrand books at their local bookstore or order via the Firebrand Books website at www.FirebrandBooks.com. (Shipping is always free.)

Bookstores can order through Client Distribution Services, 800-343-4499, or any of the major distribution companies (Baker and Taylor, Koen, Ingram, Bookazine.)

BTWOF: Any closing thoughts?

It's been a great year for Firebrand. As I've traveled the country getting to know readers and writers, from Los Angeles to Iowa City to Washington, D.C., I've been amazed by the encouragement of loyal fans of Firebrand

Books. We couldn't do it without our readers. Their enthusiasm sustains us. And I just want them to know how much we appreciate their support.

[back to top](#)



News

Congratulations to [National Book Award](#) finalists John D'Emilio and Jacqueline Woodson. John was nominated for **Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin**, which reclaims Rustin's place in history as the brilliant organizer behind the 1963 March on Washington and claims Rustin a heroic - and persecuted - gay organizer. Jacqueline, who is one of my favorite YA writers, always offers teens a needed perspective on the issues in their lives: race, class, sexual identity, displacement, incest and sexual abuse, having a lesbian mom.... She was nominated for **Locomotion**, a novel in poetry about a boy who finds his way into himself when a teacher introduces him to poetry and encourages him to write.



[back to top](#)

And in conclusion,

Thanks again for your patience as we get BTWOF up and running. It's been a slower, more complicated process than we'd expected, but it's definitely worth it.

I hope you enjoyed this issue. Please tell your friends and colleagues about Books To Watch Out For. -You can click on the Tell-A-Friend links in the left hand column to send them a copy of this issue or the gay men's issue. If you're in a gift-giving mood, BTWOF is a gift that keeps giving, all year-round.

See you next issue,

Carol Seajay
for *Books To Watch Out For*



(c) 2003 Books to Watch Out For
Graphics © [Judy Horacek](#)