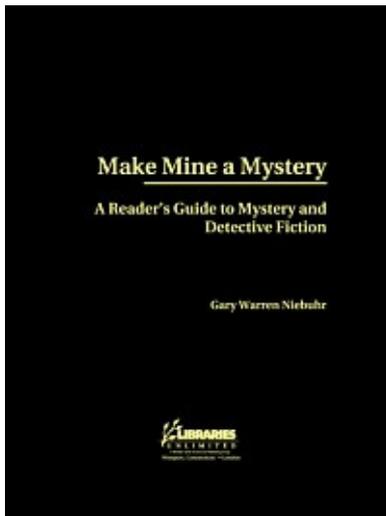


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**Make Mine a Mystery**

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**Genreflecting Advisory Series**

Diana Tixier Herald, Series Editor

*Genreflecting: A Guide to Reading Interests in Genre Fiction, 5th Edition*

By Diana Tixier Herald

*Teen Genreflecting*

By Diana Tixier Herald

*Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*

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*Fluent in Fantasy: A Guide to Reading Interests*

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*Now Read This: A Guide to Mainstream Fiction, 1978–1998*

By Nancy Pearl with assistance from Martha Knappe and Chris Higashi

*Now Read This II: A Guide to Mainstream Fiction, 1990–2001*

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By John Mort

*Strictly Science Fiction: A Guide to Reading Interests*

By Diana Tixier Herald and Bonnie Kunzel

*Make Mine a Mystery: A Reader's Guide to Mystery and Detective Fiction*

By Gary Warren Niebuhr

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# **Make Mine a Mystery**

**A Reader's Guide to Mystery and Detective Fiction**

**Gary Warren Niebuhr**



Westport, Connecticut • London

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*Dedicated with all my love to my parents, Warren and Joyce Niebuhr.  
Through the magic of parenthood they set this reader on a path of  
lifelong learning, and for that I will always be grateful.*

GWN

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## Acknowledgments

Reading mystery fiction is my hobby. I have been a lifelong reader, and for that character trait I need to thank my mother and father whose guidance led me to be the reader that I am. As a young man, my parents allowed me access to our public libraries, and that has led to a career as a librarian.

I dabbled in the Hardy Boys and Sherlock Holmes as a developing reader, but my interests in mystery fiction as a hobby did not take off until I took a course as an undergraduate in college. The very first book we read in that survey course was *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler. This book was my epiphany.

I now own about 6,000 private eye novels. I want to acknowledge the efforts of all the mystery writers whom I have encountered, and thank them for their effort on my behalf.

Along this 25-year route that I have taken, many individuals have influenced me. In the mystery field, Mary Ann Grochowski got me started, and Marv Lachman has kept me going. Wonderful editors like Jeff Meyerson, Art Scott, George Easter, Bill Ott, Lynn Kaczmarek, and Chris Aldridge have afforded me the opportunities to test my wings. I especially want to thank all the caring and giving mystery fans who have influenced me since I first entered the mystery fan community. A big thanks to Patti Cheney and her friends on Dorothy-L who helped solidify the authors included in the bibliography. A big thanks to my fellow Noirsketees, Theodore B. Hertel, Jr. and Sandy Balzo, for their help in previewing this work.

This book could not have been written without the awe-inspiring work by Allen J. Hubin, *Crime Fiction*. There may be no greater single contribution to mystery fiction research than this effort, and it is greatly appreciated.

In the library profession, certain leaders have inspired me to try to write this book and I hope they find it up to their standards. Joyce Saricks has been an inspiration from the first time I heard the words readers' advisory, and Ted Balcom has shown how a love of books can be expressed to our customers. Roberta Johnson and Duncan Smith have shown how electronic resources can be used to promote reading in an era when many think the book is losing its purpose. As a fan, librarian, and mystery mentor, I owe a great debt to Beverly DeWeese for a lifetime of friendship built on a love of books.

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Some of these annotations may have appeared previously in print in one or more of the following sources: *A Reader's Guide to the Private Eye Novel* (G. K. Hall, 1993), *Booklist*, *DAPA-EM*, *Deadly Pleasures*, *Mystery News*, or *The Poisoned Pen*.

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Any errors or omissions in this work are unintentional, and in the spirit of maintaining the level of research intended to do a revision, I would appreciate receiving any comments readers may have to improve a later edition. My e-mail address is [piesbook@execpc.com](mailto:piesbook@execpc.com).

I would like to thank my wife, Denice, who may be tired of reading the next statement because it is the same statement from the last book I wrote, but it is still true. After 20 years of marriage, she still agrees to live in poverty because of a basement full of books. But she understands, and that is all I need. This book could not have been written without her support.

## **Introduction**

### **An Overview of This Book**

This book is to help readers' advisors, librarians, and others develop a greater understanding of the mystery genre so they can make reading recommendations and successfully answer questions raised by readers who enjoy reading mysteries. The book covers mystery detective novels where a fictional character tries to solve a puzzle concerning a crime to the administration of justice. It does not cover crime, intrigue, thrillers, suspense, adventure novels, or true crime stories.

According to 2001 statistics maintained by the Romance Writers of America from figures provided by several sources, popular fiction sales figures are as follows:

Romance fiction, 37.2 percent

Mystery/Detective/Suspense fiction, 28.1 percent

General Fiction, 12.9 percent

Science Fiction, 7.2 percent

All other types, 14.6 percent

According to the database maintained by *The Droid Review of Mystery* for 2001, there were approximately 900 new mysteries published in the United States during that year, or about three a day. In the same year, there were approximately 700 paperback reprints of previously available titles. At that rate, even the most dedicated mystery reader is going to need some guidance in selecting authors, titles, and series characters to read in the mystery fiction genre. This book serves as an introduction to the mystery, with an emphasis on the mystery series character.

Because I am attempting to represent the entire mystery detective genre, I have included titles from the entire history of the genre. The development of the mystery began in the 1700s. This book covers publications from the late 1800s to 2002. This historical approach, I hope, will deepen the readers' advisor's understanding of the genre and its evolution over time to better understand what appeals to readers of this genre. It also serves mystery readers, who often take interest in the evolution of the genre and of their favorite characters.

Many of the titles listed in this book are in print. However, some titles will only be found by searching a quality collection in a large public library or by haunting specialty mystery or used bookstores. Because of their loyalty to series characters, mystery readers are quite willing to track down older and out of print titles featuring those characters. Readers who are intrigued should not hesitate to use interlibrary loan

at their local library, or use the World Wide Web to search for out-of-print book dealers that carry mystery fiction.

The titles listed for each author include all titles in a series. Titles written by the author in other areas of the mystery field (such as suspense or crime) and titles written outside the mystery genre will not be listed. (Sources listed at the end of this work can help you find additional titles by the listed authors.)

Each entry provides complete bibliographic information, listing the first edition first, whether it is the British edition or the American edition. Alternate titles are provided. An asterisk (\*) at the beginning of an entry indicates that the title was not located for review in time for this publication. Unfortunately, it can also mean that the title was unavailable from interlibrary loan, a tragedy of loss that bears some contemplation for librarians interested in preserving this literature for the ages.

Although this book is intended for professionals who advise readers, it will also be useful to fans of the genre, mystery bookstore owners, educators who teach literature courses in mystery, mystery publishers, and writers who want to publish in the genre.

### **Developing an Interest in Readers' Advisory**

One of the hardest tasks in readers' advisory service is to determine the appeal of a work of fiction and recommend read-alikes to our customers. For some librarians, this type of question can make their day. For others, it can be the excuse needed to claim it is break time and to flee to the darkest corner of the tech processing area. There is no hope here for the weak of heart, for there are no easy answers in readers' advisory. However, the good news is that there are also no wrong answers—only bad answers.

Librarians have been trained never to give an answer at the information desk without quoting chapter, verse, and source. Although valid for questions dealing with how many home runs Henry Aaron hit, this process does not work in readers' advisory. The customer is really asking for the librarian's opinion. The customer wants to hear what the librarian has to say about a particular part of literature. The customer values the librarian's opinion and is asking the librarian for guidance. Here is a golden opportunity to shine. The customer has validated the librarian as someone whom the customer trusts to consult. Not the reference books, not the databases, not the vertical file, but the librarian. No pressure there—for as everyone knows, not only has the librarian read all the books in the library, but also remembers everything about them including the color of the covers.

Readers' advisory questions are the best and the worst of information work. They combine the challenge of wanting to provide the absolutely correct answer to the reference question with the freedom to equivocate by expressing opinion and conjecture based on the librarian's own knowledge. The process can be especially challenging if the query is in a field of fiction in which the librarian does not read. Each sub-genre of fiction has its intricacies, its specialties, and its appeals. This work attempts to develop the librarian's knowledge of the intricacies and specialties of the

mystery field. To speak specifically about mysteries: what make a mystery a mystery, what are the types of mysteries, and what is the general appeal of a mystery to a reader?

## **The Sub-Genres of Mystery Fiction**

Let us take a look at the types of books in the genre to see how the definition of the sub-genres can create an appeal.

What is a *mystery*?

A mystery is a work of fiction in which the reader is asked to help solve a puzzle. The essential ingredients are an element of crime mixed with an element of detection.

What is a *detective novel*?

A detective novel is a mystery in which a fictional character tries to solve the puzzle before the reader does. It is an intellectual exercise. The concept is that the author will “play fair” with the reader by providing clues. It is fair for the author to use “red herrings” to distract the reader. The central question is “whodunit?”

What is a *crime novel*?

A crime novel observes the undertaking of a criminal act, but does not necessarily have a detective who pursues either the criminal or a sense of justice.

What is *intrigue*?

In a novel of intrigue, the goal is accomplished by devious means.

What is a *thriller*?

A thriller is fiction designed to keep the reader interested through the use of a high degree of action, intrigue, adventure, and suspense. A thriller involves the reader emotionally.

What is *suspense*?

A work of suspense keeps the reader waiting for particular outcomes, often by having the narrator in some kind of danger, even if it is a detective. It is also an emotional experience. Suspense poses a threat to a character who is often the primary victim of the evil. The central question is “who is it going to happen to?”

What is *adventure*?

Dangerous actions or risks are undertaken in an adventure novel.

This book concentrates on the mystery novel with a detective hero. It excludes novels of crime, intrigue, thrillers, suspense, adventure, or true crime stories.