



Embargoed to 10pm, Friday October 10, 2008

Media Release:

ANNOUNCING THE WINNERS OF 8th DAVITT AWARDS

Frantic (PanMacmillan), the debut novel by ambulance officer turned crime writer, Katherine Howell, tonight won Sisters in Crime's Davitt Awards for the best (adult) crime novel by an Australian woman in 2007.

Sydney writer Mandy Sayer took out the Davitt (young adult) for *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (HarperCollins) while award-winning journalist Janet Fife-Yeomans won the Davitt (true crime) for *Killing Jodie How Australia's most elusive murderer was brought to justice* (Penguin Books Australia). The Davitt (reader's choice by the members of Sisters in Crime) went to Victorian crime writer Lindy Cameron who edited *Scarlet Stiletto – The First Cut* (Mira), a collection of winning short stories over 13 years of Sisters in Crime's Scarlet Stiletto Awards competition.

This year forty-one crime books competed for the Davitt Awards which were set up by Sisters in Crime in 2001 to celebrate the achievements of Australian women crime writers. For the second year running, the Davitts have been sponsored by the Victoria Police Museum.

Sisters in Crime spokesperson, Dr Sue Turnbull, said that competition was fierce this year. "The judges were particularly impressed by the number of first time crime authors represented in the list," she said.

"Once again the books in contention for the adult fiction prize demonstrated the breadth and range of crime fiction currently being published by women in Australia. The books ranged from a thriller with a sci-fi edge to police procedurals and crime featuring a private eye moonlighting as a stripper but judges found Katherine Howell's *Frantic* most compelling page-turner on our fiction list.

"This first crime novel about an ambulance officer written by former ambulance officer (who has now given up her day job) sets off at a breathless rush with sirens blaring and barely pauses to draw breath. The plight of a mother whose child is abducted raised the stakes in an effective thriller which makes vivid use of Sydney as a setting."

Howell, who worked as an ambulance officer in Tweed Heads while she wrote *Frantic* told the packed crowd of over 100: "To be a woman writing crime fiction in Australia today is to be part of a tradition dating back to 1865 when Ellen Davitt published *Force and Fraud*, Australia's first mystery novel, and I'm both proud and humbled to win this award named after her," she said.

"She would've had it hard back then. It's tough enough today, writing for so many years in the hope of eventual publication. At least now we have writers' centres and groups like Sisters in Crime where we can get together with like-minded people who are engaged in the same struggle. When I was writing *Frantic* I read the Sisters in Crime journals assiduously, studying the articles by published writers in an effort to learn their secret, and daydreaming about my own books being reviewed in its pages. To finally get there was every bit as good as I'd imagined."

Fighting for justice for women crime writers; promoting women's crime fiction

Sisters in Crime Australia, Inc. ABN 52 728 423 463

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Frantic is being published in France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the UK over the next year. Howell's second novel *The Darkest Hour* came out in May.



Four other adult novels were shortlisted by the judges: debut crime novel, ***Bye Bye Baby*** (HarperCollins) by Lauren Crow; ***Killing the Rabbit*** (Bantam, USA) by Alison Goodman, ***Cherry Pie*** (Allen & Unwin) by Leigh Redhead and ***El Dorado*** (Picador), an eroto-poetic thriller by Dorothy Porter

Dr Turnbull said that the judges were also impressed by Mandy Sayer's novella, *The Night Has A Thousand Eyes*. "Like *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, the judges considered this a crossover book which would appeal to older teenagers and young adults alike. The prose is luminous, the characterisation convincing and the narrative gripping."

Sayer won the Australian/Vogel Literary Award with her first novel, *Mood Indigo* and has since published six books, including the crime-themed *The Cross*. Sayer's second memoir, *Velocity*, won the South Australian Premier's Award for Non-Fiction and *The Age Book of the Year Award* (Non-Fiction).

Dr Turnbull said that *Killing Jodie* was the story of dogged and determined police work involved in catching a repulsive and evasive killer of vulnerable women. "*Killing Jodie* is written in a measured way that avoids sensationalism and intrusion of privacy, a somewhat refreshing change for this genre."

Fife-Yeomans is now chief reporter at *The Daily Telegraph* in Sydney but covered the case for *The Australian*. This is her sixth true crime book. Others include *The Coroner* with former NSW State Coroner Derrick Hand.

Dr Turnbull said that no one was more surprised than the convenors of Sisters in Crime when the 500 members of the organisation voted for *Scarlet Stiletto: The First Cut* as their favourite crime book of 2007.

"It might seem a bit incestuous but *Scarlet Stiletto: The First Cut* was the clear winner of the readers' vote. It's an excellent read and shows just how much talent the competition has unearthed over the years," she said. "Judging the Davitts it was gratifying to note how many of the authors have been encouraged by Sisters in Crime either as past winners or through the Scarlet Stiletto Awards competition."

County Court Judge Liz Gaynor was guest speaker at the Davitts award ceremony at the Celtic Club in Melbourne tonight and also presented the awards. Judge Gaynor, a former criminal barrister and noted wit, has been a judge of the Ned Kelly crime writing awards for a number of years.

"We're delighted to be partners in crime with the Victorian Police Museum," Dr Turnbull said. "Their generous support has enabled us to pay for writers' travel and accommodation and the trophies."

The judging panel comprised Jane Sullivan (*The Age* literary columnist), Dr Shelley Robertson (Sisters in Crime member, forensic pathologist), Rosi Tovey (former owner of Chronicles Bookshop in St Kilda, Dr Sue Turnbull (Head of Media Studies, La Trobe University, Sisters in Crime national co-convenor and *Sydney Morning Herald* crime columnist), Vivienne Colmer (Sisters in Crime national co-convenor, and reviewer) and Katrina Beard (reviewer and former Sisters in Crime national co-convenor).

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The awards are named after Ellen Davitt (1812-1879) who wrote Australia's first mystery novel, *Force and Fraud*, in 1865.



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