

Jessie Bishop Powell



The groom is big,
the bride is hairy ...
and the best man is dead!



The Marriage at the Rue Morgue

Publisher's Weekly calls *The Marriage at the Rue Morgue* an "intriguing whodunit" and an "appealing read".

Q: Publisher's Weekly calls the book darker than the typical cozy mystery. Is it really a cozy?

A: Absolutely. Although the dark overtones distinguish Rue Morgue from many books in the genre, cozies aren't only about lighthearted fun. Some might call it a "soft boiled" mystery, but I find that term off-putting and misleading. For me, the real identifying feature of cozy mysteries is the way they let authors take a sidestep away from a situation to evaluate it from an unusual, often humorous perspective. A primatologist-amateur-detective-couple is unquestionably humorous. Is there such a thing as a dark cozy? I'd call it that.

Noel is the novel's heart. And she's an amiable amateur detective with a PhD, living in a small town, the very definition of a cozy heroine. And other than the awkward problem of a dead best man, the biggest problems she has for much of the novel are an orangutan that refuses to be contained and snoopy family and friends who won't stop over-planning her wedding.

Q: Why is "soft boiled" misleading? In the end, what distinguishes this from a thriller?

A: I don't like the term "soft boiled", because it implies to me that the author approached a dark topic, but then shied away from it at the last second, rather like a soft boiled egg approaches solidity, but then has that gloppy yolk in the middle that didn't get fully cooked. The dark matter in Rue Morgue is fully explored, but it's not a dark story.

In a thriller, the darkness is always right around the corner, waiting to pounce on the reader and potentially devastate the main character. In Rue Morgue, the darkness never takes complete control, and Lance and Noel have each bounced back from past personal devastations that give them a degree of perspective now.

Q: Sometimes stories that run along the edges of a genre struggle to find a publishing home. Did the "dark" part of the story make it hard to find a publisher?

A: No. I attended the annual Killer Nashville conference for several years running and met Five Star's senior editor Deni Dietz. The more I got to know her, and the more I learned about the press, the more certain I became that it was a perfect match for Rue Morgue. She actively seeks new authors and judges books for their writing.

Q: What's with the primates? Why put a bunch of monkeys in Ohio.

A: The storyline is a play on Poe's Murders in the Rue Morgue. Spoiler alert: In Poe's story, the orangutan dunit. I wanted a story with an innocent orangutan suspected of a murder. Also, I wanted something closer to a real morgue, not a street with that name. So the story grew out of imagining what would have happened if Poe's premise had been flipped.

I'm no primatologist, but I'm a good researcher, given decent direction. Melanie Bond at Florida's Center for The Great Apes really kept me from going off the rails with my apes and directed me to superb resources, many of them available online. But since I had to get all my ape information from outside resources, I wanted a familiar setting to work with. I was worried about dropping a bunch of primates down in the middle of Ohio, but then I learned that there actually is a primate sanctuary in the neighboring state of Kentucky! Other tidbits I turned up in research similarly helped shape and justify some of the book's key moments.

Q: What was your favorite part of writing the novel?

A: I usually draft in my head, then type when I can grab a minute between life's insanities. I'm unused to sitting at the keyboard fumbling for a word, but Rue Morgue explores themes I have no personal experience with, not just Noel's past abusive relationship, but primatology, trying to relate to an adult sibling, and dealing with batty in-laws. In other words, though Noel has some things in common with me, a great many elements of her life were not things I could draw on my own experiences to craft. The story is told from her point of view, so thinking a situation through and realizing, "Yes, that's how Noel would experience and handle it," and being able to put that into words was particularly satisfying.

