



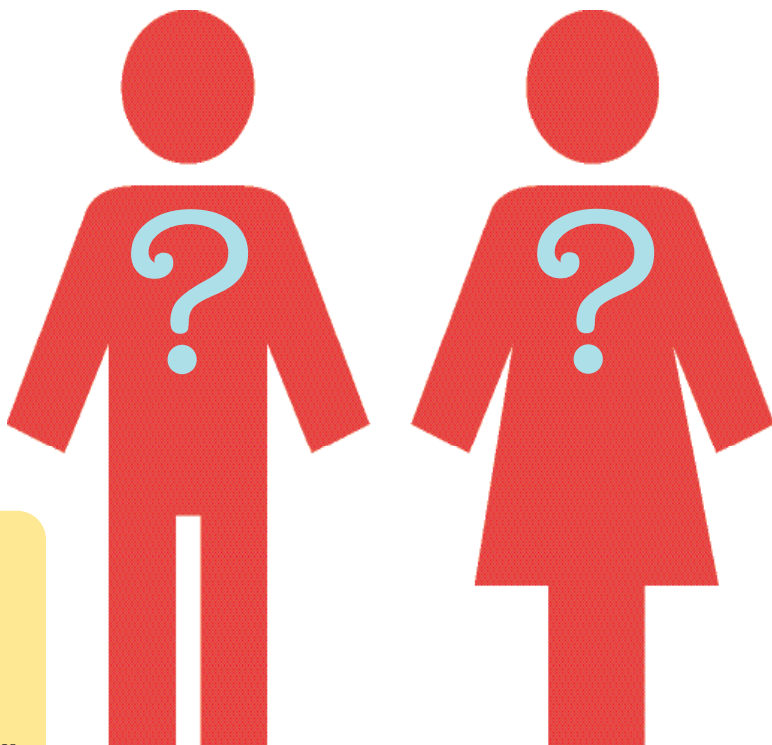
Alphabet Soup

A WHO'S WHO OF INITIALED PSEUDONYMS

By E.M. Petruzzi

LATELY WE HAVE been noticing a lot of initials appearing in place of authors' full names on book covers — following in the footsteps of the popular J.R. Ward and the classic S.E. Hinton.

And while once upon a time in the not-so-distant past female authors sported initials to obscure their gender, the better to garner respectability and readership or break into genres dominated by men, here in 2011, what's fueling the need for initials? We went straight to some initialed scribes to find out who's behind those letters. Their answers may surprise you!



M.J. Putney

Male: Female:

You may also know her as: Mary Jo Putney

Genre: Young Adult

Latest Title: *Dark Mirror* (St. Martin's Griffin, Mar.)

Why M.J.? We didn't want to hide my identity, just make it clear that my YA series, *Dark Passage*, is a different kind of book from my adult romances. I didn't want either adult or young adult readers to be disappointed because a story isn't what they have a right to respect.

Whose idea was it? My agent, editor and I all kicked this around, with input from the St. Martin's Press marketing and sales departments as well. We all had the same goal: to get the books to as many readers as possible. That's why ultimately it was decided not to waste a name I've spent more than 20 years developing.

D.E. Meredith

Male: Female:

Genre: Historical Mystery

Latest Title: *Devoured* (Minotaur, Nov. 2010)

D.E. stands for: Denise Ellen. Ellen was my grandmother's name, so I was given Ellen as my middle name. It ties me to Ireland, and memories of endless summer holidays spent on my grandparents' farm feeding the chickens, collecting eggs, bringing in the hay with my Uncle Frank who used to buy me chocolate.

B.B. Haywood

Male: Female: (Married couple)

Genre: Mystery

Latest Title: *Town in a Lobster Stew* (Berkley Prime Crime, Feb.)

What does B.B. stand for? Our first names — Beth and Bob.

Why B.B. Haywood? The simplest explanation is that our real last name gets misspelled a lot, so we thought we'd create an author name that's easier for readers to remember for our Candy Holliday mystery series. We initially thought about using two separate pen names, since we're co-authors, but again, that became complicated, so we agreed to choose a single name.

Do people call you B.B. at book signings, etc.? Not yet, but it's probably only a matter of time. Beth essentially represents B.B. for us, since (we think) she kind of looks like B.B.

Why initials? I wanted to have a non-gender-specific name giving me a bit of mystery, being a mystery writer! Names which lead on initials are a little bit more elusive, a little bit more enigmatic, I think. It's harder to pin down the person. As *Devoured* is the first in a series of a historical crime series, D.E. sounds a little bit more rooted in the past than Denise, which I think of as being quite a 20th-century name.

J.L. Saint

Male: Female:

You may also know her as: Jennifer St. Giles

Genre: Thriller

Latest Title: *Collateral Damage* (Samhain, Dec. 2010)

J.L. stand for: My name, Jenni Leigh

Why J.L.? Changing my name had everything to do with the shift in my genre and in my desire to broaden my reading audience. J.L. Saint has a sharper image to it than Jennifer St. Giles, which has a more romance feel to it. *Collateral Damage* is more thriller oriented and I wanted to convey that in my name. In *Collateral Damage*, the plot is the principal force driving the story, not the romance.

And I want to broaden my reading audience. Men and sometimes women are more inclined to read a non-gender-

specific author name when it comes to thrillers, mysteries and suspense. But have no fear, I will keep producing the stories I love under J.L. Saint and Jennifer St. Giles, thanks to the emerging e-book format.

N.K. Jemisin

Male: Female:

Genre: Fantasy

Latest Title: *The Broken Kingdoms* (Orbit, Nov. 2010)

N.K. stands for: Nora Keita

Why initials? I'm aware that in the old days, in science fiction and fantasy, women had to use initials or masculine-sounding pseudonyms because of rampant, overt sexism in the field on the part of editors and readers. That sexism hasn't gone away completely — I've encountered epic fantasy readers who refuse to read my work because I'm female — but I haven't encountered *many* overt sexists, thankfully, so I didn't really feel the need to hide my gender. Honestly I was just trying to draw a distinction between my day job career and my writing career.

Does anyone call you N.K. now at book signings, etc.? Yes, lots of people opt for that, especially online where they don't always know my gender. It's been an on-off nickname of mine for a while now, so I tend to respond to it just as readily.

C.W. Gortner

Male: Female:

Genre: Historical Fiction

Latest Title: *The Tudor Secret* (St. Martin's Griffin, Feb.)

C.W. stands for: My first and middle name: Christopher Willis

Why initials? It started out purely coincidental. When I published my first book through an independent press, the designer did a marvelous illustration. Unfortunately, it filled so much of the cover, it left only a small space at the top for my name. The designer asked if I'd consider shortening my name, so I looked at other historical/mystery writers and noticed some used initials. So, I came up with C.W. I liked how it sounded. And it fit.

J.J. Murphy

Male: Female:

Genre: Mystery

Latest Title: *Murder Your Darlings* (Obsidian, Jan.)

Why initials? My real name is John Murphy — a name that's as bland as low-cal mayo on Wonder Bread. And there are John Murphys everywhere. You probably know one. There's another John Murphy on my same street. My neighbor was married to one. We're everywhere. So, I thought right from the start about using a pen name.

Whose idea was J.J.? My editor, Sandy Harding at NAL/Penguin, came up with J.J. If you ask her, she may tell you the reason for this is that women make up the majority of mystery readers. And, since my book features a female protagonist, Dorothy Parker, then a man's name on the cover might cause some potential readers to think twice before buying. I secretly know it's because she had a childhood crush on Jimmie Walker, who played J.J. Evans on the TV sitcom "Good Times." When she found out my initials were the same (my middle name is Joseph), she called me up and suggested using J.J. Murphy as a pen name. I said sure. She answered, "Dyn-O-Mite!" That confirmed my deepest suspicions.

Name Game

CAN YOU FIGURE out just who these initialed authors are? Match up the pseudonyms in column A with their full name counterparts in column B and e-mail your answers to Elissa@RTBookReviews.com for a chance to win a book pack in the genre of your choice: paranormal, mystery, historical, contemporary or YA. We'll publish the answers online at RTBookReviews.com on March 15.

COLUMN A

1. J.K. BECK
2. J.D. ROBB
3. C.C. HUNTER
4. V.K. SYKES
5. C.E. MURPHY
6. G.A. McKEVETT
7. J.C. WILDER
8. C.S. HARRIS
9. M.C. BEATON
10. M.J. LOCKE

COLUMN B

- A. VANESSA KELLY
- B. LAURA J. MIXON
- C. CANDICE PROCTOR
- D. DOMINIQUE ADAIR
- E. MARION CHESNEY
- F. CHRISTIE CRAIG
- G. JULIE KENNER
- H. SONJA MASSIE
- I. CATE DERMODY
- J. NORA ROBERTS