

## 'Pot' mystery writer keeps 'em laughing

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As with his earlier "Pot Thief" mysteries, J. Michael Orenduff's latest, "The Pot Thief Who Studied D.H. Lawrence," is shot through with humor, humor in the service of a tale well told.

The chuckles begin on page 18, near the end of a short chapter. Protagonist and acknowledged pot thief Hubert Schuze, who owns a shop in Old Town, has just met an Indian who wants to sell him three pots in exchange for one made by a particular Native artist. Schuze is thinking out loud: "Who deserves the pot? Who should decide?" Then he adds the non sequitur, "What time is it?"

The next chapter begins with a phrase that Orenduff gets away with because of the intentional levity: "It was a dark and stormy night. I'm not kidding. It really was."

In a phone interview, the author, a former president of New Mexico State University, explained why he wants to provoke laughs.

"Basically, I view it as a kind of entertainment," Orenduff said from his home in Valdosta, Ga.

To make his point he said he read about 100 pages of a Stieg Larsson crime novel. Larsson was the Swedish author of "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo," one of a trilogy of best-sellers published after his death.

"He got such good reviews. I read about 100 pages. It was so sick and depressing. 'I don't need this.' So I stopped," Orenduff recalled.

His goal has been to write something that readers will have a few good, relaxing hours of fun with. "I write what I call escapist books. I don't think I need to apologize for it," Orenduff said.

Humor has been at the core of his public life. As a college instructor at Sophie Newcomb College, he found that a bit of humor to open his math class put students at ease and maybe learn better. As an administrator he had to make speeches, and used the same approach: "If I started a speech with a joke, the audience paid more attention when I got to the serious stuff."

Orenduff is donating his proceeds from the sale of the book to the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy. His 2011 novel, "The Pot Thief Who Studied Einstein," won a Lefty Award.

J. Michael Orenduff discusses, signs "The Pot Thief Who Studied D.H. Lawrence" at 6 p.m. Wednesday, June 27, at Collected Works, 202 Galisteo, Santa Fe (with Sonni Cooper and Marilu Norden); at 2 p.m. Friday, June 29, at Moby Dickens Bookstore, 124A Bent St., Taos; and noon-4 p.m. June 30 at Gruet Winery, 8400 Pan American Freeway NE.

"The Pot Thief Who Studied D.H. Lawrence" by J. Michael Orenduff Aakenbaaken & Kent, \$14.95, 234 pp.

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