



MYSTERIOUS WAYS: Kate's Mystery Books, in Cambridge, is getting into the publishing business.

[BOOKS]

Reading the Clues

For a new local publishing house, the marketing mystery might be solved. By John Patrick Pullen

"MYSTERIES ALWAYS HAVE a beginning, middle, and end," says Kate Mattes. She would know; she's the Kate of Kate's Mystery Books, the nationally renowned Cambridge bookstore. "Some writers may not have started out to write a mystery but wound up writing one, or felt that it opened doors that regular fiction couldn't."

Mysteries are also opening doors for Stephen Hull and his new publishing house, Justin, Charles & Company, headquartered in Park Plaza. In a unique marketing partnership, Hull has teamed up with Mattes to create the "Kate's Mystery Books" imprint. As Hull describes it, Mattes is his "ambassador" to the mystery genre.

"If a book is going to have my imprint, then I have to agree to it," says Mattes. To that end, she reviews manuscripts, recommends advertising outlets, and suggests places to send review copies.

Over the next two months, Justin, Charles will dive into the mystery market with its first four books—two under the Kate's imprint. With *Dead Clever* by Scarlett Thomas in February and *The White Trilogy* by Ken Bruen in March, Hull hopes Kate's Mystery Books becomes "an immediate and, hopefully, lasting brand identity." His strategy of genre publishing isn't groundbreaking, though he thinks this is the first time a startup publisher has teamed up with an experienced independent bookseller.

First, the backstory. Hull began in Boston publishing more than 20 years ago and has since seen many endings. He worked at Little, Brown before it moved away, at Allyn & Bacon before it was sold away, and at Zoland Books before it faded away. He opened Justin, Charles last year, naming it after his sons, signaling a new start for

his career. Besides mysteries, the catalog boasts Irish novels and nonfiction works such as Patrick Dillon's highly anticipated *Gin: The Much Lamented Death of Madam Geneva*, out this month. "Publishing categories are sort of cyclical, so our goal is to position ourselves as a house that does several things well," Hull says.

Mattes, meanwhile, has stayed put. For the last two decades she's stocked shelves,

recommended books, and collected black-cat paraphernalia at her Massachusetts Avenue shop. "My job is to make people happy, to give them a book they will enjoy reading," she says. She's done that, and her reputation has grown. The shop's black-cat logo is well known in national mystery circles. At September's New England Booksellers convention, people were surprised to see it on the Justin, Charles banner. "Booksellers who were walking past would just stop in their tracks and look at it," recalls Carmen Mitchell, an editor at Justin, Charles. "It piqued their interest right away."

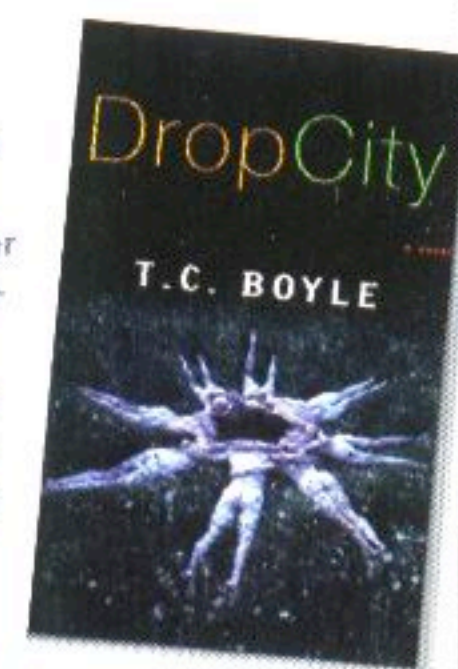
Though it's a three-person operation right now, Justin, Charles also aims to become nationally known, and using Mattes's reputation is a fast way to achieve that.

Still, being in Boston also is important to the Kate's partnership. "Think if they were in New York," says Mattes. "Their pace is different because they're here. They don't have to worry about what someone is saying from higher up."

Hull approaches it differently. "Boston is traditionally the brain trust, certainly of the East Coast, really of the country. But it has always been a place for public intellectuals, academics, and writers, and it still is. It's a great place to be a publisher." ■

[READING]

BOYLE OVER Over the course of his 15-book career, T. C. Boyle has alternately gone by T. C. and T. Coraghessan. The former is a little light for such a skillful writer; the latter, a publicist's nightmare. (His friends call him Tom.) Luckily, the work attributed to the name is consistently good—as expansive as Dickens, with enough psychedelic nuttiness to crack even a 19th-century British literature Ph.D. (of which Boyle is one). *Drop City*, due next month from Viking Press, is a riotous tale of hippies who trample into serene little Boynton, Alaska. It's oddly fitting that Boyle should read about 1960s counterculture at the upscale Charles Hotel. (T. C. Boyle, sponsored by WordsWorth Books—2/27, 7 p.m., free. The Charles Hotel, One Bennett Street, Harvard Square, Cambridge. Call 617-354-5201 or visit www.wordsworth.com.)



—Greg Lalas