

Nevada is a lead character for many authors

By John Przybys, Las Vegas Review-Journal

It's where ranchers fight over water rights, demons prowl the Las Vegas Strip, Basque shepherders reconnect with family back home and rural residents live out ordinary daily dramas. A place where storytellers with a bit of imagination can craft anything from a Western to a techno-thriller to a spy story against the backdrop of everything from wide-open desert to neon-filled urban clutter.

It's Nevada, which, thanks to its demographic, geographic and cultural diversity, serves as the setting for stories in just about every genre of literature – even if its roster of homegrown authors with widespread literary acclaim is, frankly, a bit shorter than it ought to be.

Maybe, Sally Denton figures, it has something to do with the Eastern literary establishment's jaundiced view of the American West.

"I've always been kind of struck by this kind of anti-Western bent in general," said Denton, a fourth-generation Nevadan who grew up in Boulder City and whose works of narrative nonfiction include "The Money and the Power: The Making of Las Vegas and Its Hold on America."

"It seems to me there was always this sense of the American West as kind of a poor relation to the Eastern literary elite," Denton said. "And Nevada seems to be, even, the bastard child of the Western group. I never could understand why."

Yet, "I cannot tell you how many times I've been contacted by Eastern fiction writers who want to write about Las Vegas,"

Denton added. “But you can’t crack Las Vegas if you haven’t really lived it.”

The truth is, Nevada – the real Nevada – can serve as “a setting for some really evocative literature,” Denton said, “and I think that’s one of the things Mark Twain captured.”

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