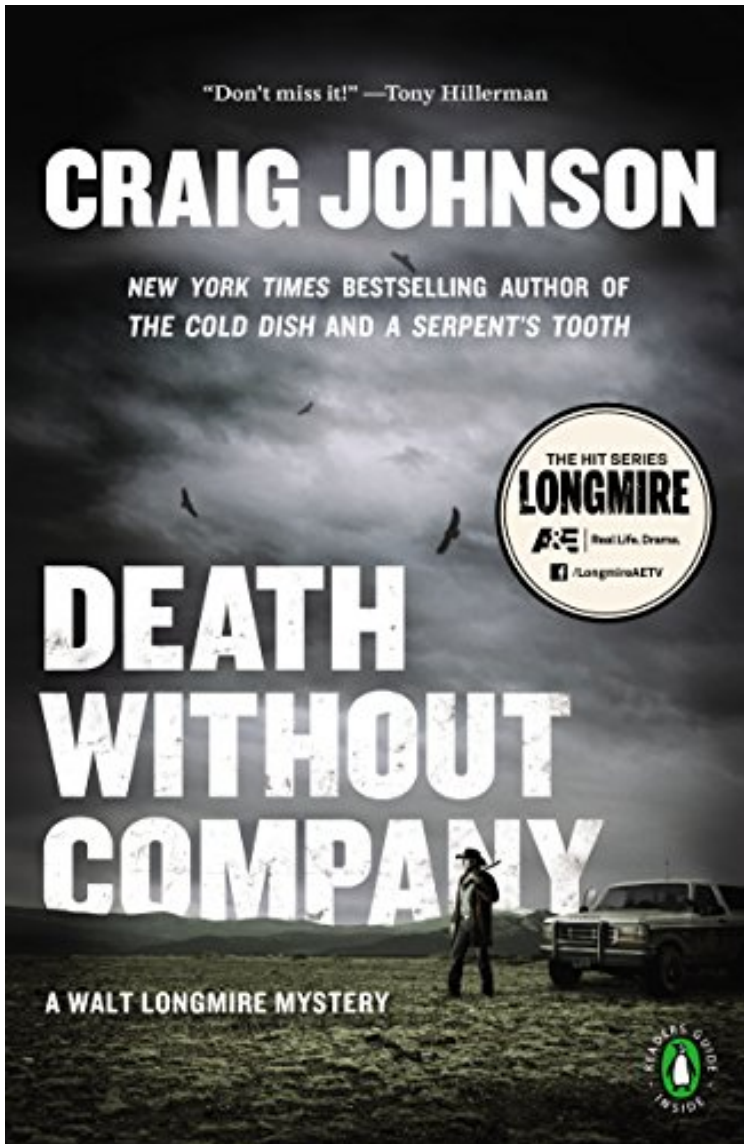


(Free download) File size: 36.Mb

Death Without Company: A Walt Longmire Mystery



Par Craig Johnson

*DOC | *audiobook | ebooks | Download*

PDF | ePub

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #199572 dans eBooksPubli le: 2007-02-27Sorti le: 2007-02-27Format: Ebook Kindle

(Free download) Death Without Company: A Walt Longmire Mystery

Par Craig Johnson : Death Without Company: A Walt Longmire Mystery before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Death Without Company: A Walt Longmire Mystery:

 [Download](#)

 [Read Online](#)

Description : Description du produit A new Sheriff Walt Longmire mystery from the author of the acclaimed The Cold Dish With his debut novel, The Cold Dish, Craig Johnson proved himself a strong new voice in the realm of literary mystery. In his newest work, Johnson again takes us to Sheriff Walt Longmires Absaroka County, Wyoming. When Mari Baroja is found poisoned at the Durant Home for Assisted Living, Sheriff Longmire is drawn into an investigation of her death that proves to be as dramatic as her life. Her connections to the Basque community, the lucrative coal-bed methane industry, and the personal life of the previous sheriff, Lucian Connally, lead to a complex web of half-truths and assumed allegiances. As the specter of Maris abusive husband arises, Sheriff Longmire, aided by his friend Henry Standing Bear, Deputy

Victoria Moretti, and newcomer Santiago Saizarbitoria, must connect the past to the present to find the killer among them. *Death Without Company* is a riveting tale of the unspeakable viciousness that can lurk in the most beautiful and unlikely of places.

Presentation de l'auteur
Walt investigates a death by poison in this gripping novel from the New York Times bestselling author of *The Cold Dish* and *Dry Bones*, the second in the Longmire Mystery Series, the basis for *LONGMIRE*, the hit drama series now on Netflix. Craig Johnson's *The Highwayman* and *An Obvious Fact* are now available from Viking. Fans of Ace Atkins, Nevada Barr and Robert B. Parker will love Craig Johnson, New York Times bestselling author of *Hell Is Empty* and *As the Crow Flies*, who garnered both praise and an enthusiastic readership with his acclaimed debut novel featuring Sheriff Walt Longmire, *The Cold Dish*, the first in the Longmire Mystery Series, the basis for *LONGMIRE*, the hit drama series. Now Johnson takes us back to the rugged landscape of Absaroka County, Wyoming, for *Death Without Company*. When Mari Baroja is found poisoned at the Durant Home for Assisted Living, Sheriff Longmire is drawn into an investigation that reaches fifty years into the mysterious woman's dramatic Basque past. Aided by his friend Henry Standing Bear, Deputy Victoria Moretti, and newcomer Santiago Saizarbitoria, Sheriff Longmire must connect the specter of the past to the present to find the killer among them.

Extrait
They used to, back in the day. What the old cowboy meant was that folks who were inconsiderate enough to die in the Wyoming winter faced four feet of frozen ground between them and their final resting place. They used to build a bonfire and allow it to burn a couple of hours, melt through the frost, and then dig the grave. Jules unscrewed the top from a flask he had pulled from the breast pocket of his tattered jean jacket and leaned on his worn shovel. It was 28 degrees outside, the jean jacket was all he wore, and he wasn't shivering; the flask probably had something to do with that. Now we only use the shovels when dirt clods roll into the grave from the backhoe. The tiny man took a sip from the flask and continued the throes of philosophic debate. The traditional Chinese coffin is rectangular with three humps, and they won't bury you wearing red cause you'll turn into a ghost. I nodded and did my best to stand still in the wind. He took another sip and didn't offer me any. The ancient Egyptians had their essential organs removed and put in jars. I nodded some more. The Hindus burn the body, a practice I admire, but we cremated my uncle Milo and ended up losing him when his top came loose and he fell through the holes in the rusted floorboard of a Willys Jeepster on the Upper Powder River Road. He thought about it, shaking his head at the ignominious end. That ain't where I wanna spend eternity. I nodded again and looked off toward the Big Horn Mountains, where it continued to snow.

Somehow bonfires seemed more romantic than construction equipment or Willys Jeepsters, for that matter. The Vikings used to stick em a fire on a boat with all their stuff and shove out to sea, but that seems like an awful waste of stuff, not to mention a perfectly good boat. He paused, but continued. Vikings considered death to be just another voyage and you never knew what you could end up needing, so you might as well take it all with you. The jackleg carpenter turned his ferocious blue eyes toward me and took another sip in honor of his ancestors, still not offering me any. I buried my hands in my duty jacket, straining the embroidered star of the Absaroka County Sheriff's Office, and dropped my head a little as he kept on talking. I had seen Jules on a professional basis as a lodger at the jail when the nephew of the previous sheriff, and deputy of mine at the time, had picked him up for public intoxication and had beaten him. I had in turn beaten Turk, much to the dismay of my receptionist/dispatcher Ruby, and then turned him over to the highway patrol in hopes that a more structured environment might do him some good. The Mongols used to ride the body on a horse till it fell off. I sighed deeply, but Jules didn't seem to notice. The Plains Indians probably had it right with the burial scaffolding; if you aren't up to anything else, you might as well feed the buzzards. I couldn't stand it anymore. Jules? Yep? I turned and looked down at him. Do you ever shut up? He tipped his battered cowboy hat back on his head and took the final swig, still smiling. Nope. I nodded my final nod, turned, and tramped my way down the hill away from the aged cottonwood at the fence line, where I had already worn a path in the snow. Jules had been there on my three previous visits, and he knew my pattern. I guess gravedigging got lonely. You can tell the new graves by the pristine markers and the mounds of earth. From my numerous and one-sided conversations, I had learned that there were water lines running a patchwork under the graveyard with faucets that would be used in the spring to help soak the dirt and tamp the new ones flat but, for now, it was as if the ground had refused to accept Vonnie Hayes. It had been almost a month since her death, and I found myself up here once a week. When somebody like Vonnie dies you expect the world to stop, and maybe for one brief second the world does take notice. Maybe it's not the world outside, but the world inside that's still. It took about ten minutes to get back to the IGA in the center of

Durant where I had left my erstwhile deputy to shanghai prospective jurors for the local judicial system. I rolled into the parking lot, scratched my beard as I parked, and looked at the plastic-wrapped bundles of wood priced at two for seven bucks that were stacked at the entrance of the grocery store. We had been forced to act as the Absaroka County press gang about eight times during my tenure as sheriff, which itself had taken up almost a quarter of a century. The jury wheels used by the county were chocked so full of outdated records that a large percentage of the summonses were returned undeliverable, and the ones that did get where they were supposed to go many times got ignored. My advice that we simply put occupant on the things was dismissed out of hand. I looked at the handsome woman at the entrance of the grocery store with the clipboard in her hands. Victoria Moretti didn't like being called handsome, but that's how I thought of her. Her features were a little too pronounced to be dismissed as pretty. The jaw was just a little too strong, the tarnished gold eyes just a little too sharp. She was like one of those beautiful saltwater fish in one of those tanks you knew better than to stick your hand into; you didn't even tap on the glass. Of all the shitty things you make me do, I think I hate this the most. I have an undergraduate degree in law enforcement, I've forgotten how many hours toward a masters, graduated from the Philadelphia Police Academy in the top 7 percent. I had four years street duty, two field commendations... I am your most senior officer. I felt a sharp jab at my midriff. Are you fucking listening to me? I watched as my highly capable and awarded deputy accosted a middle-aged man in a barn coat, copied down information from his driver's license, and informed him that he needed to get over to the courthouse pronto or be faced with contempt of court. Well, there's another notch on my Glock. I watched as the hapless shopper balanced his purchases and wandered off to his car. Hey, there are worse places for a stakeout, at least we've got plenty of supplies. It's supposed to snow another eight inches tonight. I looked over at the neatly shoveled driveways. Don't worry. You can go in and push them out, and you can do some last minute shopping. I was tapping on the glass and getting my tarnished gold's worth. How many more talis jurors do we need? Two. She searched the automatic glass doors behind us. Dan Crawford stood at the far register, registering his annoyance at our official abuse of his customer base. She looked back at me. Talis jurors? The process started in this country with the Boston Massacre. They pulled spectators out of the courtroom gallery to serve as jurors during the trial of a British soldier. It's from the Latin, meaning bystander. You're Italian, you should understand these things. I'm from Philadelphia, where we vote early and often, and everybody on the jury has a vowel on the end of his name. I looked off toward the mountains west of town and at the broiling darkness that seemed to be waiting behind the range. I couldn't help but think that it would be a nice evening to sit by the fire. Red Road Contracting had promised to have my triple-walled dome put in by last weekend, but so far all they had done was cut an opening in my roof the size of a large porthole. They said the firebox that mounted to the ceiling would cover the hole, but for now the only thing between the inside of my snug little log cabin and the impending great outdoors was ten millimeters of plastic and some duct tape. It wasn't really their fault. The coal-bed methane outfits were paying close to twenty dollars an hour, roughly twice what general contracting paid anywhere on the high plains, so Danny Pretty On Top had signed on with Powder River Energy Exploration and had left Charlie Small Horse to pick up the slack. How about I go in and push em out? she said. I looked down at her. I just want to get back and shoot your dog if he's shit in my office again. I had suspected an underlying motive. The beast did; it was true. I hadn't had him all that long, and he had decided that rather than go to the trouble of going all the way to the door and having Ruby let him out, he would just wander across the hall and unload in Vic's office. He likes you. I like him, too. But I'm going to shoot him in the ass if he leaves another little package for me. I sighed and thought about how nice it would be to go back to the warmth of my office. Okay, go ahead. It was like turning loose the dogs of war; her eyes grew cold, the mouth curved lupine, and she turned and disappeared. If it did snow tonight, the whole county would be thrown into a frozen panic, court would be canceled anyway, and my little department would likely be stretched to the limit. Jim Ferguson was only a part-time deputy and Turk was already gone to the highway patrol, so Vic pretty much made up the staff; but we had a potential candidate for Turk's job. He was a Mexican kid who had finished up at the Wyoming Law Enforcement Academy, had elected to begin his career in Kemmerer, and then had moved to the state's maximum-security prison. After two years there, it would appear that he had changed his mind and was looking for rosier pastures. He was supposed to drive up from Rawlins in the morning for an interview, but I wasn't holding out much hope. He would have to gun it over Muddy Gap at 6,250 feet through the Rattlesnake range and then up the basin to the foot of the Big Horns and Durant. It was a 7-hour trip on dry roads and, looking at the mountains, that didn't seem possible. It appeared as though we were going to get our third heavy snowstorm since fall: the first had tried to kill me on the

mountain, and the other I had enjoyed from a stool at my friend Henry Standing Bears bar, the Red Pony. It was just after Thanksgiving, and we had consumed the better part of a bottle of single malt scotch. When I woke up the next morning, Henry had already pulled a couple of leatherette chairs in front of a double forty-gallon drum stove. I slipped off the sleeping bag and swung my legs over the side of the pool table on which I had fallen asleep and tried to feel the muscles in my face. He had hauled his bag with him and sat hunched over the stove. I watched as steam blew out with my breath, and I scrambled to get the down-filled bag back around me. Heats off. He turned his head, and the dark eyes looked through the silver strands in the black curtain of his hair. Yes. I joined him at the stove in my socks. The floor was cold, and I regretted not slipping on my boots. Do you want some coffee? Yep. Then go and make some. I am the one who built the fire. I found the filters and the tin of already ground coffee on the second shelf of the bar. I had lots of little bags of expensive beans that my daughter had sent me when she was a law student in Seattle. Cady was now a lawyer in Philadelphia, and I still hadn't gotten around to getting a grinder. Henry Standing Bear had a grinder. The Bear had a vegetable mandoline, and I didn't know anybody else who had one of those. I started the coffee, hopped back over to the fire, and grabbed my boots along the way. The windows had begun to freeze on the inside. How come the water hasn't frozen? Heat tape. I pulled my boots on and gathered the sleeping bag back around me. You out of propane? The heater never works when it is really cold. That's convenient. Yes, in the summer it works perfectly. We sat there for a while, the homemade stove just beginning to warm the northeast corner of the little building or at least the sixteen inches between it and us. I yawned and watched as he yawned, too. He was studying me again. We hadn't talked in the last few days; there had been too much to say. We watched as the bottom barrel began to tic and grow red. Dena go to that pool tournament in Vegas? Yes. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I have not yet decided. It felt good there with that strange feeling of being in a public place without the public. I was going to have to call and check in, but it was still early on a Sunday, our slowest day of the week. I was avoiding it, mostly because I would get caught talking to Lucian. He had a few strange ideas about some goings on out at the Durant Home for Assisted Living and had become a kind of Absaroka County Agatha Christie. I told him that if anybody shortened the span of any of the occupants they wouldn't be robbing them of all that much, and he reminded me that he would be happy to take me by my mutilated, half-century old ear and march me around the block. Ever since I had hired the retired sheriff as a part-time dispatcher on weekends, he had been gathering his salt. I looked out through the haloed light of a high-plains winter at the falling snow with flakes the size of poker chips. I had had inclinations that it was going to be a winter to remember, and so far I had been right. The day before Thanksgiving, Cady had been trapped at the Philadelphia airport; she had been trying to get back to Wyoming for a surprise visit. I hadn't been feeling well and, after getting through one of the toughest cases of my life, she could tell. Cady had called, filled with tears and frustrated fury at a two-fold snowstorm that had grounded planes on both the eastern seaboard and in Denver, the hub to our part of the world. They had assured her that even if she did make it there, she would be spending the holiday at DIA. We talked for an hour and forty-two minutes. She was laughing that heartfelt laugh of hers by the time we were done, the one that matched her deep rustic voice, and I felt better. Dena says she is moving to Las Vegas. Really? Yes. The coffee was done, so I pulled the sleeping bag up a little higher on my shoulders and towed it over to the bar with me; I must have looked like a giant praying mantis. I poured myself a cup and got the heavy cream the Bear kept in the bar refrigerator. I added the cream to his and dumped in what I considered a reasonable amount of sugar, dropped a spoon in, and carried it over to him; I figured the least he could do was stir the thing himself. I handed him the Sturgis mug and sat back down. Things could be worse. And how is that? I took a sip of my coffee for dramatic effect. You could have been dating a murderer. I watched as the big shoulders shifted, and he stared at me. It felt wrong, saying it like that. It was disrespectful of somebody I still cared a great deal about. I guess everybody's a little nervous about talking to me, huh? His eyes were steady. Yes. I'm okay. He didn't say anything. I am. Yes. I shook my head and looked at the stove. It was warming up a little in our corner of the world, so I shrugged the bag down off my shoulders. Are you going to say anything in this conversation besides yes? I quickly added. Don't answer that. The wind pushed against the wooden sides of the old Sinclair station that Henry Standing Bear had converted into the Red Pony bar. We were on the border of the Rez, and the wind was older here. I listened to the voices of the Old Cheyenne as they screamed from the northwest and disappeared toward the Black Hills. I had had some delusory episodes during the first really big snowstorm of the season, at least that's what I had decided to label them, but I kind of missed the Old Cheyenne. They weren't all I missed. I let the bitter taste of the coffee hold there in my mouth for a second. It wasn't anybody's fault; I was running under

radio silence. My friends had spared me the crippling depth charges of understanding and, worse yet, advice, but I was going to have to come up for air; Henry was a good place to start. I don't think I'm going to date anymore. Yes. He took a sip of his coffee and nodded along with me. It is not like women are any fun to be around, that they are soft, that they smell good, or that they... Shut up. He nodded some more. Yes. We had a wide-ranging conversation about Vonnie; we talked about love, fate, and everybody's inability to truly leave the past behind. It had been an ugly little case with two young men and one beautiful woman dead and, after four years of self-pronounced isolation, I had gotten my head and heart handed to me. All Henry had said was yes. I guess that's when the valves opened, all the used air expended into the atmosphere, and all the fresh poured in. He made me run in the snow later that afternoon, and I have to admit that it felt pretty good. Vic got two more and added Dan Crawford to the list for good measure. She handed me the clipboard after she had climbed in and shut the truck door. Here, His Majesty's dutiful servants for the day. She leaned forward, and I watched as her slender neck tilted to look through the top of the windshield at the stony clouds that were bricking away the sky. What're your plans for tonight? She looked at me, and I noticed the small, etched, smile lines at the corners of her mouth. Why? You wanna go over and visit Lucian with me? The little lines quickly disappeared. I'm washing my hair. He always asks about you. He always asks about my tits. I did have ulterior motives. With her along the previous Tuesday, Lucian had been so distracted that I had won every game. Maybe you should look at it as a visit to Pappy Van Winkle? The only thing I really had going for me in persuading her to come was her taste in expensive bourbon, which was in ready supply in Room 32 at the Durant Home for Assisted Living. I can buy my own bourbon and not have to be ogled by that fucking old pervert. She shifted her weight and fastened her seatbelt. I've got to tell you, as nights on the town go? That one was pretty lame. I haven't had a time like that since my grandfather took me to a vacant lot on South Street to drink wine and play bocce ball with his cronies. She looked at me. I was six and a shrewd judge of a good time. The little lines reappeared as she laid an arm along the door and looked out across the hood of the Bullet. I glanced down at the hand resting on her leg and noticed that she wasn't wearing her wedding band anymore. She and Glen had come to a parting of the ways back in November; he had gone to Alaska, and Vic was still here, thank God. She had turned down respective offers to ?aunt her honor, service, and integrity with the Philadelphia Police Department, where she had worked before, and the Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Investigation. She was that good. Instead, she was the under-sheriff of the least populated county in the least populated state in the union, with an option to have my job come November. I blinked, refocused, and became aware that she was looking at me. What? I asked how you were doing these days. Good. She waited. You know I am available on a professional consulting basis for fucked-up relationships, right? I've got your card. By the time we got to the office behind the courthouse, the smallest traces of snow had begun drifting down in a nonchalant manner. This one thought it could fool us by starting out slowly. There were times in Wyoming when you needed to know where to park your car so you could find it in the morning. I followed Vic and paused to scan my doorway for Post-its as she stopped and gathered her mail from Ruby's desk. The dog raised his eyes, looked between the two of us, and then settled the ?ve-gallon bucket-head back on his paws. Vic nodded as she shuffled through her mail. Yeah, I'd keep a low profile if I was you too, shit head. I had inherited Ruby from Lucian. Fierce as a bobcat and as loyal as the Swiss, she kept a neon blue eye toward my moral development. She was sixty-?ve, going on thirty. I cut in quickly, before the real ?ghting started. Post-its? Ruby continued to pet Dog. Somebody dumped a bunch of garbage and an old refrigerator out at Healey Reservoir. Let me guess who found that. Our resident ?sherman and part-time deputy, the Ferg, kept us up to date on all the ?shing holes in the vicinity. He says they left some of their mail in the garbage bags, so he's gone over to the trailer park near the bypass to have a little chat with the suspected offenders. Oh, Rawlins called to confirm his interview tomorrow. The Mexican kid? She turned. He doesn't sound Mexican. What does he sound like? Just different. She went back to her screen. Lucian called to make sure you were going to be there tonight. Are you being mean to him? He usually doesn't call to confirm chess night. I picked up some of the general delivery stuff, ?ipped through the latest police garment catalog, and thought about replacing my duty coveralls. He's been weird lately. How? I decided to keep my old pair and closed the catalog. Just odd, like he's got something on his mind. I tossed it into the wire wastebasket and started toward my office. Does that kid know that it's going to snow ass deep to a nine-foot Indian tonight? Her eyes drifted up to look at me over the computer screen. Does your Native American friend know you use such descriptive terms? I paused at my doorway. Where do you think I get em? Where is the Bear these days? The women in my life always asked about Henry; it was irritating. He's up on the Rez in the basement of some defunct Mennonite church. I leaned against the

doorjamb and thought about what I would do if Ruby ever retired; I would have to retire, too. They found a couple of old hatboxes full of photographs that the Mennonites must have taken a long time back. Mennonites on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation? I shrugged with one shoulder. It didn't take. Sounds like a treasure trove. He's cataloguing and annotating something like six hundred photographs. Her eyes returned to the screen, and the soft tap of the keyboard resumed. That should keep him out of trouble for a while. I missed Henry but figured he'd get back in touch when he got the chance. He was like a warm Chinook that blew in when you least expected it. I scratched my beard. Anything else? Her eyes returned to the screen.

Were putting together a petition to get you to shave. My desk was relatively clear for a Tuesday, and Santiago Saizarbitorias file was on the top of the nearest pile. Santiago Saizarbitoria. What did she think, he was Norwegian? I didn't think the kid was going to make it, but I had ten minutes of the taxpayers time to kill, so I flipped the manila file open and looked down at the cover sheet. I hadn't ever spoken to him. Ruby had gotten the application via priority mail with a letter of introduction and a rsum. All of the contact since then had been done by e-mail on Rubys computer. I didn't have a computer; they wouldn't let me have one. Vic would be responsible for half of the interview, which would probably resemble revenge for the Inquisition. If the kid was lucky tomorrow, he'd spend the day at the Flying J truck stop in Casper, go home to Rawlins, and continue his career in corrections. He was married, and his wifes name was Maria. They had no children, and his starting salary had been \$17,000, 18 percent less than the nationwide average. He was twenty-eight, five feet nine inches, weighed 183 pounds, and had dark hair and eyes. He obviously had a facility with languages; he spoke Spanish, Portuguese, French, and German. I would have to check on his Cheyenne and Crow. I flipped to the back page and locked eyes with the two-by-two photo. Swashbuckling. I guess that was the first strong impression that I had of the young man Vic had already tagged as Sancho. He was a handsome kid with a Vandyke that gave him a rakish and mischievous musketeer quality. He was thick and looked strong, although his features were fine. I always concentrate on the eyes, and these were sharp with just a little bit of wayward electricity in them. I had the suspicion that not much got by Sancho and what did was viewed with quiet irony. If we were serious about him, we'd have to call Archie, the chief of police in Kemmerer, and then the man who was his supervisor in Rawlins. He had lasted two years in the extreme risk unit in the high security ward at the states penitentiary. That told me something. We are for the dark, indeed. Whenever I read an application, I always found myself wondering what my answers to the questions would be. What impression would I have of myself, and would I hire me? I hadn't had to fill out a form when I had gone to work for Lucian: he hadn't had one. We had been sitting at the bar in the lobby of the Euskadi Hotel on Main Street. It was late on a Friday night and Montana Slim sang Roundup in the Fall through his nose on the jukebox, and we were the only ones there. Lucian preferred the Euskadi, because the bar didn't have any video pong games or customers, in that order. It was late October, and I had a new wife and thirty-seven dollars in a checking account. So, you were a cop over there in Vietnam? Yes, sir. I had caught him in midsip. Don't call me sir. I ain't yer daddy, far as we know. I watched him hold the glass tumbler and look at me from the corner of a webbed apex of sundried wrinkles and the blackest pupils I'd ever seen. He was about the age I am now; I thought he was ancient. Is it as big a mess over there as I think it is? I thought about it. Yep, it is. He sipped his bourbon and carefully avoided the wad of chew packed between his lower lip and gum. Well, ours was probably just as bad. We just didn't have enough sense to know it. I nodded, since I didn't know what else to do. Seems to me with this Vietnam thing, you get yourself into trouble fifteen thousand miles from home, you've got to have been lookin' for it. I nodded some more. Drafted? Lost my deferment. What the hell'd you do that for? Graduated. He placed the cut-glass tumbler back in the small ring of the paper cocktail napkin and nudged it toward Jerry Aranzadi, the bartender, whom I did not know at the time. Where from? I took a sip of my Rainier and hoped my bank account would last through the interview. University of Southern California. He didn't say anything. It's in Los Angeles. He nodded silently as Jerry refilled his glass with at least four fingers. Two things you gotta remember, Troop. He called me Troop for the next eight years. A short pencil is better than a long memory, and you get to buy me my chew cause I'm a cripple. The last part of the statement referred to his missing leg, which had been blown off by some Basque bootleggers back in the fifties. What brand? I closed Santiago Saizarbitoria, placed him carefully on the surface of my desk, and made myself the promise to remember the rube kid with the funny haircut who had sat in the Euskadi Hotel bar and wondered what the hell he was going to do if the old man sitting next to him said no. I'm going home. I looked up from the surface of my desk to my deputy. What's it doing outside? Snowing like a bastard. Despite the fact that she was leaving, she came in, sat down, and folded her jacket on her lap. She nodded toward the file. Is that Sancho? Yep. What do you think? She

shrugged, I think that if hes got a pulse and a pecker, we put him on patrol. She continued to look at me. What are you going to do about dinner?I dont know, maybe go down to the Bee. The Busy Bee was in a small concrete-block building that clung to the banks of Clear Creek through the tenacity of its owner and the strength of its biscuits and spiced gravy. Dorothy Caldwell had owned and operated the Bee since Christ had been a cowboy. I ate there frequently and, due to its proximity to the jail, so had our infrequent lodgers.I bet shes gone home.Ill take my chances. If worse comes to worse, I can always catch the pepper steak over at the Home for Assisted Living.She made a face. That sounds appealing.Better than a plastic-wrapped burrito from the Kum and Go.Boy, you know all the hot spots, dont you?I have been known to show a girl a good time, yes.After Vic and Ruby had gone, the beast ambled in and sat on my foot. I was second string, but it was still good to be on the team. She was probably right; with the impending storm, Dorothy had most likely headed home for the night. I weighed my options and settled on a chicken potpie from the jails resources. Dog followed me as I rummaged through the mini refrigerator and pulled out the freeze de jour. We didnt have any occupants, so I took my steaming little tin into holding cell 1 and sat down on the bunk with a can of iced tea. Dog curled up at the door and looked at me. I had taught him that begging was all right if it was done from at least six feet away.There were no windows so I could ignore the mounting snow outside, but the phone that began ringing, I could not. I sat my half-eaten chicken potpie tin on the bunk and answered the extension on the wall of our kitchenette. Absaroka County Sheriff s Department.Is this the goddamned sheriff ?I recognized the voice. Maybe.Well, if you aint him then somebody better go out and ?nd the simple-minded son of a bitch and tell him to get his ass over here. I aint got all night! The phone went dead with a loud crack as the cradle on the other end absorbed the impact, and I stood there listening as my potpie was devoured.I had talked Lucian into coming on as a part-time dispatcher on weekends, and I think he enjoyed it, but I would be the last one he would tell. He drove the rest of the staff crazy, but Dog liked him and so did I. I took the pie tin and threw it into the trash along with the plastic spork and my empty tea. I headed for the of?ce to grab my coat; Dog followed.Vic was right. By the time we got outside, it was snowing so hard that you couldnt see across the street to the courthouse. I squinted against the sting, tugged at my hat, and took in the vague halos of the arch lights that ran the distance of Main Street. There was only one car, and it was parked about halfway between the Busy Bee and the Sportshop. The dog halted beside the truck and turned his nose into the wind with me. I opened the door and watched as he climbed across and onto the passenger seat. He turned and looked at me, waiting for me to climb in, but I looked back at the parked car. He stretched across the seat and settled in for a short nap, knowing full well what I was going to do before I did.I walked down the slight grade to the parked vehicle, careful not to slip, stooped down, and wiped the snow from the front plate of the maroon Oldsmobuick: state plates, county 2, Cheyenne. I looked around at the storefronts, but the only one that showed any signs of retail life was the Euskadi Hotel bar where the Rainier and Grain Belt beer signs softly glowed in the two tiny windows.Except for the Christmas decorations, the bar at the Euskadi hadnt changed much since Lucian had hired me there all those years ago. The jukebox was still there, playing an unintentionally ironic version of Sinatras Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow. There was an ornate burl wood bar and bar back along the right side, whose ancient mercury mirror was tarnished and faded in its attempt to hold on to the glory of the age and it re?ected the blonde at the bar.I pushed my hat back to its best Dashiell Hammett advantage and felt the slick of melted snow slide down between my shoulder blades and my sheepskin coat. As entrances, Id made better.Hello, Sheriff. Jerry Aranzadi was still the full-time bartender. A small man with a stooped back and black-rimmed glasses, his narrow shoulders hunched as he scooped into the cooler and popped the cap on a Reindeer beer before I could stop him. It was at times like this that I wished my habits were a little more exotic. What brings you out on a night like tonight?I sat a few stools down as Jerry placed a paper napkin on the bar along with the bottle of beer. He knew all my patterns, even the one about sparing the glassware. Its chess night.I took a sip of my beer. She didnt look at me but seemed absorbed in what looked to be an Irish coffee. He gently patted a hand in front of her cup to get her attention. Miss Watson, this is our sheriff, Walter Longmire.I always try to hold on to the ?rst impression I get of a person; usually its a feature, but with her it was the energy that was there, an animation that couldnt be concealed by age, fatigue, or alcohol. Afterward, I noticed that she was just plain beautiful, with large, frank blue eyes and well-de?ned lips. Sheriff, this is Maggie Watson, and I bet you cant guess what she does for a living.Ms. Watson works for the state. I took a sip and looked back at both of them. I really enjoyed watching those big blue eyes widen as they looked at Jerry and then back to me. I guessed mid to late forties; outdoorsy, and always had been from the face, nicely weathered to perfection. She had an athletic build, probably a skier. The plates on the car outside. Elementary, my dear...

The eyes narrowed. Bet you wish you had a nickel for every time somebody said that. You have no idea. She had a nice voice, too. It was soft, but also strong and with just a touch of a southern accent. State Treasury Department. She smiled a sly smile and took an elegant sip of her coffee. Unclaimed property project manager. It was her turn to look self-satisfied. We don't see many of those up in these parts. I nodded and looked over at Jerry. Can't say we've seen any at all. It got a laugh that was melodic but short. I restore the contents of abandoned safe-deposit boxes to the owners or rightful heirs. She sat her mug down and gave me a sharp look. At least I was, till I got stranded. I thought about it for a moment, then felt duty call and sat the almost full beer back on the bar. Gimme your keys, and I'll start it for you. I think we can get you a room, if we move quickly. Motels get to be at a premium when the weather gets like this. I tried to pay Jerry, but he just waved me off. Back at my truck, Dog greeted me with a terrific yawn and confirmed my thoughts about his concern for my welfare while I was gone. I cleared the accumulated snow with the windshield wipers and turned on the cautions on the Bullets light bar. A vague feeling of sadness always came over me in the presence of the lights: too many seat-belts that were unfastened, too many bald tires. I pulled in front of her car, snagged the long-handled scraper from under the seat, and pushed the majority of the snow off her vehicle onto the covered street. An hour from now, the car would have been a permanent addition to Main. She came running out and jumped in. She was taller than I thought, or else she just didn't sink into the snow like I did. Follow me and drive in my tracks, okay? She nodded, and I closed the door. She dutifully made the illegal U-turn and followed me back up the hill and around the courthouse as we slowly made our way toward the mountains. The red glow of the Log Cabin Motels neon wasn't far and, if worse came to worse, she could walk to all the banks in town from there. I pulled up to the office and got out, ignoring the no vacancy sign. I ushered her to the porch and rang the buzzer on the intercom, pulled her in a little closer to the building, and blocked the majority of the wind with my back. She smelled really good. There was no response to the buzzer, so I pressed my thumb against the button and held it there. After a moment, an angry voice screeched at us through the yellowed plastic intercom. No vacancy, can't ya read? There was no more talk but presently a gaunt individual in a threadbare plaid bathrobe appeared around the counter in the tiny lobby and unlocked the door. Jesus, Walt, what are you doing out in this? I ushered Maggie in before me. This lady needs a room. I took the key from Williss wife, Erma, and trudged off into the snow to turn the lights and heat on in one of the cabins at the end of the short lane. It would be a cozy little place but, as I told her, the temperature wouldn't get above forty for about twenty minutes. I don't know how to thank you. Well, if you come up with any Declarations of Independence in any of those boxes... It's doubtful, but I could buy you lunch. The trip over to the Durant Home for Assisted Living didn't take all that long, just a couple of blocks of backtracking. When I got there, there was an EMT van waiting at the main entrance, not a completely novel experience at the place but still a little unsettling. The doors were closed, but it was still running and the amber lights made racing, yellow ghost-wolves that darted across the brick surface. I pushed the doors of the building open, only to be audibly driven back by Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians singing Ring Those Christmas Bells at an ear-piercing volume; most of the residents at the home were deaf as fence posts. Dog followed me in. As we went past the Christmas tree behind the abandoned front desk and rounded the hallway leading to Room 32, a slight sense of panic began to set in. The door was ajar as we approached, and I quickened my step, but the place was empty. The chess set was out on the folding table, and it looked as though Lucian had already consumed the better part of a tumbler full of bourbon. Dog looked around with me and followed as we quickly made our way out of the room, back down the hallway, and again toward the front desk. The Pennsylvanians were still singing as we turned the corner. I caught a glance of the EMT van pulling away, but my attention was drawn to a white-clad attendant. He was being held against the far wall by what I knew to be the strongest grip in the county. I took the direct route behind the counter, which turned out to be something of a mistake in that my legs got tangled with Dog and the hammer of my .45 snagged the lights on the fully decorated tree, lurching it from the wall in a short spark of holiday exuberance. It took both hands and all the weight I could leverage to tug Lucian's hand free from the choking assistant whom I recognized as Joe Lesky. Well, it's about goddamned time. He rolled off me against the far wall and pushed himself up with his arms; he glared at Joe who was massaging his throat and coughing as Dog, who had escaped unscathed, continued to bark. Shut up! Dog stopped and went over and sat beside Lucian as if nothing had happened. I was not so forgiving. I pushed the tree off me. What the hell is going on around here? It was mostly directed at Lucian but, after a coughing fit, Joe was the first to respond. Mr. Connally was interfering with the transport of a departed client. He coughed some more and leaned against the opposite wall. I want the room behind me sealed up as a crime scene, and I want a full

autopsy arranged immediately. I stared at him as he looked at the battle-weary tree that lay between us. Lucian, have you lost your mind? It was a bad time for Joe to talk, but he didn't know that. Sheriff, I was explaining to Mr. Connally that we couldn't hold the body of the deceased without the permission of next of kin. He wouldn't look up from the tree. You got it. I disconnected the electric light string from my holster and gave the tree one last kick for holly-jolly good measure. Lucian, you can't. The dark eyes came up slowly, and the world was swallowed. Hold your peace. He looked old just then; small, old, and tired, as I had never seen him before. His eyes returned to the dead lights of the tree. She was my wife. Booklist*Starred * Johnson's second Walt Longmire novel more than fulfills the expectations created by the series debut, *The Cold Dish* (2004). Longmire, the aging, kindly, but tenacious sheriff of Wyoming's Absaroka County, once again finds himself involved in a murder case with tentacles reaching deep into the fabric of daily life in his insular mountain community. It all begins with the death of a Basque woman in an assisted-living home, but the circumstances of that death prompt Longmire and his bantering, foulmouthed deputy, Victoria Moretti, to begin nosing around in the victim's past. The trail leads in multiple directions, most of which converge on Longmire's mentor, former sheriff Lucian Connally. Like C. J. Box in his Joe Pickett series, Johnson uses the landscape of the Wyoming high country to evoke the sense of lives crushing in upon one another, as secrets refuse to stay buried, and old wounds continue to fester. Box's hero, Joe Pickett, is an outsider in his world, however, and Longmire is very much a comfortable part of Absaroka County, a kind of old shoe, in fact, like former sheriff Bill Gastner in Steven Hamill's series set in the very different landscape of Posadas County, New Mexico. Johnson combines a vivid sense of the dailiness of life--and the way human relationships take root in that dailiness--with a sure-handed touch for jolting both his characters and his readers out of their comfort zones and deep into harm's way. It's hard to ask for more in a literary mystery.

Bill Ott Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved