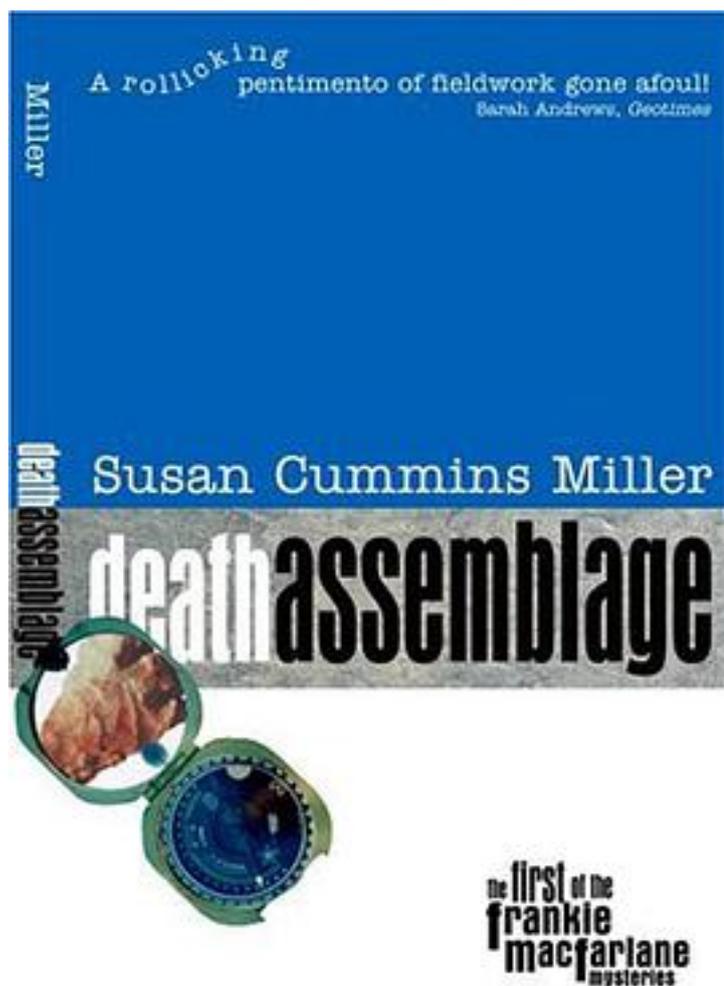


Death Assemblage



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The mountains west of Pair-a-Dice, Nevada, hold mysteries geological, historical, and

personal. Geologist Frankie MacFarlane has mapped the Paleozoic and Mesozoic sedimentary rocks of the range for the past three summers. In the final week of her dissertation fieldwork, she searches for an elusive final key to her research: a limestone marker bed--a death assemblage of fossil ammonoids--hidden by dangerous, shifting talus. But as Frankie strives to piece together her geologic jigsaw puzzle, the denizens of Pair-a-Dice, her base of operations, embroil her in a web of ancient and recent murders, a manhunt, kidnappings, and blackmail. A thirty-truck town, fifty miles from anywhere, Pair-a-Dice boasts two restaurants, three bars, seven pool tables, twenty-one slot machines, and a motley assemblage of misfits, including Diane Laterans, a punk school-teacher who wears her Phi Beta Kappa key from her ear; Isabel Elorrio, crusty ex-marine and motel proprietor; Lon Bovey, rancher and would-be congressman; Walker, a mute handyman; the Anderson brothers, hooligans claiming kinship to infamous Bloody Bill; and a stranger, E. J. Killeen, U.S. Army, retired. Two bodies are discovered near Interstate 80, disrupting Frankie's research. Are the killings linked to Killeen, to the new waitress in town, to Frankie's ex-fiance, who disappeared four months ago, or to older violence, the clues of which Frankie discovers in the mountains? Frankie's environmental sensibilities and her grasp of geologic and human continuums make her truly a woman and sleuth of the new millennium.

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