



# montana noir

Forthcoming from Akashic Books September 5, 2017

## **PRESS KIT**

*EDITED BY* **JAMES GRADY & KEIR GRAFF**

**THOMAS MCGUANE ♦ GWEN FLORIO ♦ WALTER KIRN ♦ JAMIE FORD**

**JANET SKESLIEN CHARLES ♦ DAVID ABRAMS ♦ AND OTHERS**



# MONTANA NOIR

EDITED BY JAMES GRADY AND KEIR GRAFF



Grady and Graff, both Montana natives, masterfully curate this collection of hard-edged Western tales.

## ABOUT MONTANA NOIR

Akashic Books continues its groundbreaking series of original noir anthologies, launched in 2004 with *Brooklyn Noir*. Each story is set in a distinct neighborhood or location within the city of the book.

Montana is a state that many Americans know very little about, but its criminal dimensions can sometimes run as deep as anywhere else in the country. Whether the setting is urban (or what passes for urban in Montana) or rural, or somewhere in between, the stories in this volume bring the full state to life . . . or death.

**Featuring brand-new stories by:** David Abrams, Caroline Patterson, Eric Heidle, Thomas McGuane, Janet Skeslien Charles, Sidner Larson, Yvonne Seng, James Grady, Jamie Ford, Carrie La Seur, Walter Kirn, Gwen Florio, Debra Magpie Earling, and Keir Graff.

## FROM THE INTRODUCTION

*This anthology is a road trip through the dreams and disasters of the true Montana, stories written by authors with Montana in their blood, tales that circle you around the state through its cities and small towns . . .*

*No doubt the state's beauty will still make the very idea of Montana Noir seem incongruous to some. Noir is black-and-white. Streets and alleys. Flashing neon lighting a rain-streaked window. But while noir was definitely an urban invention, it knows no boundaries. Noir is struggle. It's doing the wrong thing for the right reasons. It's being trapped. It's hubris. It's being defeated yet going on. Sometimes it's being defeated and not going on.*

*That's life everywhere.*

*This is our Montana.*

## ABOUT JAMES GRADY

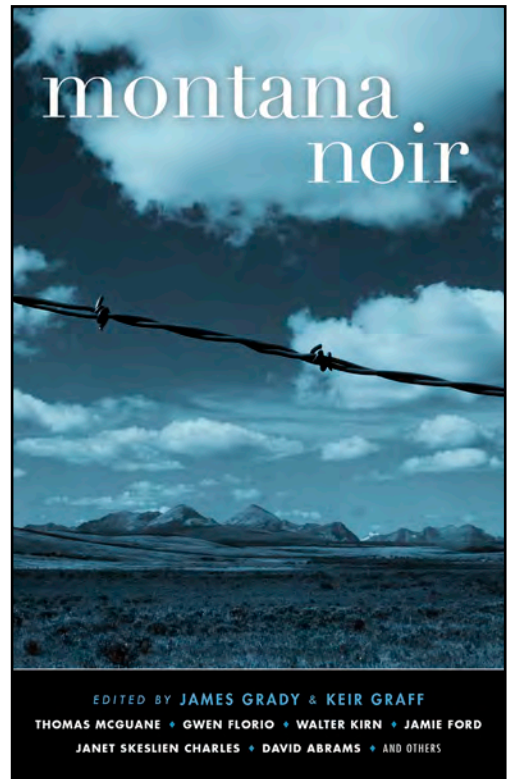


**JAMES GRADY** was born and raised in Shelby, Montana. His first novel, *Six Days of the Condor*, became the iconic Robert Redford movie.

## ABOUT KEIR GRAFF



**KEIR GRAFF** was born and raised in Missoula, Montana. He is the author of four novels for adults (most recently *The Price of Liberty*) and two novels for middle-graders. Graff now lives in Chicago, where he is the executive editor of *Booklist*.



**MONTANA NOIR** | edited by James Grady and Keir Graff | Pub. Date: Sept. 5, 2017 | 288 pages | Fiction/Mystery/Short Stories

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## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**David Abrams** is the author of the novels *Brave Deeds* and *Fobbit*. *Fobbit* was named a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2012, an Indie Next pick, a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, a Montana Honor Book, and a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction. His stories have appeared in *Esquire*, *Narrative*, *Glimmer Train*, and many other publications. He lives in Butte with his wife.

**Janet Skeslien Charles** grew up in Shelby and attended the University of Montana. Her novel *Moonlight in Odessa*, which explores the business of e-mail-order brides, was translated into ten languages. She currently lives in Paris, France.

**Debra Magpie Earling** is Bitterroot Salish and a member of the Flathead Nation. She is the author of the novels *Perma Red* and *The Lost Journals of Sacajewea*. She has been a recipient of an NEA grant, an American Book Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. She is currently the director of the creative writing program at the University of Montana.

**Gwen Florio** is an award-winning journalist who turned to fiction in 2013 with the publication of *Montana*, which won the Pinckley Prize for Debut Crime Fiction and a High Plains Book Award. *Disgraced* is the third novel in the Lola Wicks series, and two more are scheduled. Florio lives in Missoula.

**Jamie Ford** loves living in Great Falls, his home for seventeen years, though he occasionally calls it Adequate Falls. His debut novel, *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, spent two years on the *New York Times* best-seller list and went on to win the 2010 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature. His most recent novel, *Songs of Willow Frost*, was published in 2013. His work has been translated into thirty-four languages.

**James Grady** was born and raised in Shelby and graduated from the University of Montana. He was a research analyst for the state's 1972 Constitutional Convention and a legislative aide to Montana's US Senator Lee Metcalf during Watergate. Grady's first novel, *Six Days of the Condor*, became the iconic Robert Redford movie. He has published more than a dozen other novels, twice that many short stories, and worked as a national investigative reporter.

**Keir Graff** was born and raised in Missoula, where he attended Hellgate High School and, briefly, the University of Montana. He is the author of four novels for adults (most recently *The Price of Liberty*), two novels for middle-graders, and many short stories. Graff now lives in Chicago, where he is the executive editor of *Booklist* and cohost of the popular Publishing Cocktails events. He returns to Montana every year.

**Eric Heidle** is a full-blooded Montanan-American working east of the divide as a creative director, writer, and photographer. In 2015 his story "At Jackson Creek" took first place in Montana Public Radio's fiftieth-anniversary short-fiction contest. Heidle's photography has appeared in *Montana Outdoors*, *Backpacker*, and other publications. When he's not at his desk, he is usually roaming the Rocky Mountain Front, paddling the Missouri, or failing to catch fish.

**Walter Kirn** is the author of eight books and an e-book. His most recent is *Blood Will Out*, a memoir of his friendship with murderer Clark Rockefeller. His other books include *Up in the Air*, *Thumbsucker* (both of which have been made in to feature films), and *Mission to America*. A columnist for *Harper's*, he has also written for the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New Republic*, *GQ*, *New York*, and *Esquire*. He lives much of the year in Livingston.

**Sidner Larson** is the former director of American Indian Studies at Iowa State University (2000–2015); an enrolled member of the Gros Ventre tribal community of Fort Belknap; and the author of *Catch Colt*, *Captured in the Middle*, and numerous academic articles and poems. He is currently teaching at the University of Arizona Law School and working on an indigenous peoples law book.

**Carrie La Seur** is a Billings-based environmental lawyer whose debut novel, *The Home Place*, was on the Indie Next list, won a High Plains Book Award, and was a finalist for a Strand Critics' Circle Award. Her work has been published in the *Daily Beast*, *Grist*, the *Guardian*, the *Harvard Law and Policy Review*, *Huffington Post*, *Kenyon Review*, *Mother Jones*, *Oil, Gas and Energy Law*, *Salon*, and the *Yale Journal of International Law*.

**Thomas McGuane** has written ten novels, beginning with *The Sporting Club* (1969), as well as three nonfiction essay collections and three short-story collections. His short fiction began regularly appearing in the *New Yorker* in 1994. McGuane's novel *Ninety-two in the Shade* was a finalist for the National Book Award, and other works have been included in *Best American Stories*, *Best American Essays*, *Best American Mystery Stories*, and *Best American Sporting Essays*. He lives near McLeod.

**Caroline Patterson** is the author of the story collection *Ballet at the Moose Lodge*. A former Stegner Fellow in fiction at Stanford University, she edited *Montana Women Writers: A Geography of the Heart* and published fiction in journals and magazines including *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Big Sky Journal*, *Epoch*, *Southwest Review*, and *Seventeen*. She lives in Missoula, where she is the executive director for the Missoula Writing Collaborative.

**Yvonne Seng** has lived in Montana for most of the twenty-first century—in Missoula, Ovando, and Helena, where she was curator for the Holter Museum of Art—all after having worked extensively in the Middle East. Born in Australia, her first book was the nonfiction *Men in Black Dresses: A Quest for the Future Among Wisdom-Makers of the Middle East*. Her short fiction has appeared in the anthology *Explosions: Stories of Our Landmined World* and the literary journal *Gargoyle*.

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# THE AKASHIC NOIR SERIES

In the summer of 2004, when Akashic Books published *Brooklyn Noir*, edited by Tim McLoughlin, we never expected it to launch a series. What we had was an editor who was Brooklyn to the bone, born and raised and with generations behind him, visitor to all of the borough's wildly unique neighborhoods and utterly indifferent to the rarified culture of Manhattan's literary elite. Tim's concept was to identify local authors who knew Brooklyn's neighborhoods even better than he did, to ask them to write original stories, and as its editor to celebrate his beloved and diverse home. As it turned out, this was the perfect model for a series, and we used it to identify editors throughout the country and the world who hold their cities as close to the heart as Tim holds Brooklyn. Now, we have over sixty volumes offering sinister literary tours to national and international cities.

Since that first volume, our Noir Series has been recognized with nominations and awards throughout the mystery and literary world, from the Shamus, Derringer, Macavity, and Anthony Awards to the Pushcart Prize. Two stories published in the Series have won the Edgar for Best Short Story, and in 2013, Akashic founder and publisher Johnny Temple was awarded the Ellery Queen Award, a monumental achievement.

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BARCELONA NOIR (SPAIN), edited by ADRIANA V. LÓPEZ & CARMEN OSPINA  
BEIRUT NOIR (LEBANON), edited by IMAN HUMAYDAN  
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BOSTON NOIR, edited by DENNIS LEHANE  
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BROOKLYN NOIR, edited by TIM McLOUGHLIN  
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SYDNEY NOIR (AUSTRALIA), edited by JOHN DALE  
VANCOUVER NOIR (CANADA), edited by SAM WIEBE

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# KIRKUS NOIR: NOT JUST DARK ALLEYS ANYMORE

Akashic Books publisher Johnny Temple interviewed by Clayton Moore  
December 6, 2013

It's hard to believe that I've been writing about Akashic Books for almost a decade now. Since publishing their first book, Arthur Nersesian's *The Fuck-Up* back in 1996, this great American independent publisher has continued to give voice to some of the finest, strangest literature in the Western world. Their latest collection is a milestone, a greatest hits of sorts culled from the Akashic Noir line that curates collections of crime stories based around the character of specific cities.

*USA Noir* collects 37 of the best stories from over 50 other compilations. I'm pleasantly startled to find that I've interviewed almost a dozen of the contributors, who include icons of the crime scene like Dennis Lehane, Lawrence Sanders and George Pelecanos as well as eclectic writers like Joyce Carol Oates, the poet and novelist Maggie Estep, and the talented Megan Abbott.

The new book gives me a good excuse to sit down with Akashic's editor-in-chief Johnny Temple, who was honored by the Edgar Awards earlier this year with the Ellery Queen Award. Not that he stuck around to receive it; Johnny was inconveniently on tour in Europe with his popular post-punk band Girls Against Boys. He's one of those guys who make you wonder what you've been doing with your time.

"First of all, it was something I wanted to do because I had so many favorite stories myself," he says from Akashic's HQ in Brooklyn. "I've basically been the co-editor of the entire series but I never had my name on a book cover before. It's something I'm enormously proud of, not just for myself but also for everyone at Akashic and what we've accomplished. It's a real milestone for us and everything we have built here."

Unlike other collections, the stories in *USA Noir* are grouped thematically under six general ideas, which lends a nice nefarious flow to the reading.

"We definitely wanted to group the stories, so we found categories that were broad enough to capture six or seven stories each," Temple explains. "You have sections like 'True Grit,' which holds all our gritty, hardscrabble American stories, or 'Road Rage,' with stories that have a strong travel or vehicular component to them."

Temple has always identified Akashic as an author-oriented publishing house so he was quite surprised to earn the Ellery Queen Award.

"That was an incredible and amazing honor," he says. "Sometimes in this line of work, there aren't a lot of rewards, so recognition is important. We don't get paid well for what we do, so there are very few physical awards and the nuts and bolts of running a small independent publishing house can be thankless. By design, being a publisher is often invisible work because it's all about the books and the authors. When we were given that award, it meant the world to us."

Temple is not the only one to earn a trophy off of the series either. Three of Akashic Books' Noir authors have earned the Robert L. Fish Memorial Award from the Mystery Writers of America, while stories from *Los Angeles Noir* and *Phoenix Noir* have been awarded for Best Short Story. You would also be surprised to learn that it's not the most famous mystery writers who earn those awards.

"Of course, Dennis Lehane will always find a home for his work, but part of this story is not just getting people like Dennis Lehane or Joyce Carol Oates or Pete Hamill to write stories for us," Temple says. "It's also about bringing up unknown writers. We're not just proud that we have some bestselling novelists writing for us but also that we publish brand-new writers in these collections."

That often means that some of these heavy-hitting contributors also lend their hands as editors of these collections, lending their specific knowledge of a city and the genre to crafting the very best representation of a place and time. That often means creating brilliant marriages, like Dennis Lehane editing *Boston Noir*, George Pelecanos getting gritty with *DC Noir*, Lawrence Sanders lending his prickly voice to *Manhattan Noir*, or Denise Hamilton overseeing the city of angels in *Los Angeles Noir I* and *II*. There's a real art to assembling a Noir collection, according to Temple.

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“It’s not as simple as picking out a bunch of stories set in Istanbul,” he explains. “There are curatorial and editorial layers that are far deeper than the surface level. That’s why we want to be working with people who have a strong common vision. In the case of Lehane in Boston or Laura Lippman in Baltimore, those were obvious choices for us. It was just a matter of somehow cajoling these creators into editing the books. Other books, like *Richmond Noir*, came to us. Andrew Blossom, Brian Castleberry and Tom De Haven came to us with a lot of ideas and enthusiasm, so we worked it out. At the same time, we turn away about 95 percent of the submissions we receive because it’s important for the books to uphold a very high editorial standard and also for the books to fit within the series.”

I’ve always been personally impressed with the enormous societal and stylistic diversity contained within the Akashic Noir series. A less enlightened collection of crime and mystery stories could easily reduce itself to stereotypical cartoons about white detectives with a whiskey bottle and a gun in the drawer but Akashic’s series takes itself very seriously in its mission to represent all aspects of a city’s dark side.

“Yes, we believe deeply and passionately in diversity but there’s more behind it,” Temple explains. “It’s not just about social justice, like we’re purposefully bringing more women in to give them a fair shake. It’s more important to us to make the best book possible. If you have a big book and the majority of the contributors are men, it’s going to be a less interesting book, leaving aside issues of equality. If you have a series based around American cities and 90 percent of your protagonists are white, you’re not doing a good job of representing these places. One of the purposes of these books is really capturing the essence of a particular place and you can’t do that if you’re only looking at one segment of the population.”

Our of my own curiosity, I have to ask about Akashic’s relationship with novelist Adam Mansbach, who has made some great creative strides in his last two books *Rage Is Back* and *The Dead Run* and also contributed stories to *Brooklyn Noir* and *Cape Cod Noir*. Mansbach also famously became the most successful author in Akashic’s history when his children’s book satire *Go the Fuck to Sleep* went viral, selling hundreds of thousands of copies and inspiring no less than Samuel L. Jackson to read the audiobook.

“Adam co-edited an anthology for us (*A Fictional History of the United States with Huge Chunks Missing*) and we struck up a friendship,” Temple recalls. “We have similar musical tastes and we enjoy each other’s company. I remember we were at a friend’s wedding and we were both there with our kids. A few months later, he got the idea for the book, and I imagine that he thought since I was a parent, I would get the humor of it, and he was right. I just got lucky in that we had that relationship. I’ve often thought that the best thing about me is the people that I hang out with. It just happened to be a huge plus in this case.”

Asked if it was at all frustrating to see successful writers abandon Akashic to take their novels to other houses, Temple looks back to his own experience with Girls Against Boys, who signed to Geffen Records in 1996. The move caused some backlash from players in the indie music world, who criticized the band for “selling out.”

“You know, even when we were on top of our game as one of the most popular indie bands in the country, packing clubs and selling records, we couldn’t afford health insurance,” Temple says. “So I have no problem with authors moving on to much larger publishing companies.”

And so this is the way of the world these days. The big-time cash from a major record label has evolved into the small independent publisher that turns out new content on its website daily and is about to launch a young adult line with that shadowy Akashic twist. It’s all been quite the happy accident, Temple says.

“I’ve always loved books but I never intended to be a book publisher,” he says. “This was supposed to be a record label. It was completely on a whim that we published our first book because there weren’t a million indie book companies the way there were record labels. I quickly realized that publishing books brought me everything that was exciting to me about running a record label. But I’ll give it to you that it’s always a little curious that I became a book publisher given that I wasn’t much of a bookworm.”

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