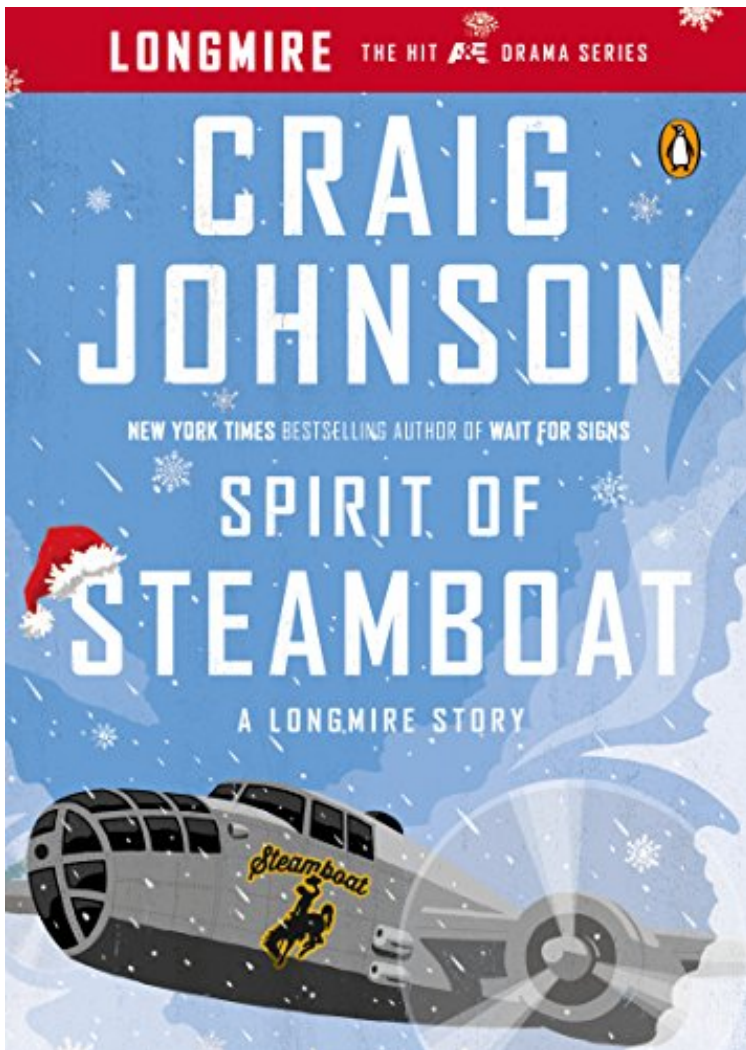


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Spirit of Steamboat: A Longmire Story



Par Craig Johnson
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA Christmas novella for fans of the hit drama series LONGMIRE now on Netflix and the New York Times bestselling series. Craig Johnson's new novel, The Western Star, will be available from Viking in Fall 2017. Sheriff Walt Longmire is in his office reading A Christmas Carol when he is interrupted by a ghost of Christmas past: a young woman with a hairline scar and more than a few questions about his predecessor, Lucian Connally. With his daughter Cady and undersherrif Moretti otherwise engaged, Walts on his own this Christmas Eve, so he agrees to help her. At the Durant Home for Assisted Living, Lucian is several tumblers into his Pappy Van Winkles and swears hes never clapped eyes on the woman before. Disappointed, she whispers Steamboat and begins a story that takes them all back to Christmas Eve 1988a story that will thrill and delight the bestselling series devoted fans.Extrait**This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof.**1It was Tuesday, the day before Christmas, and I wasnt expecting visitors. I stared at my arch?nemesis, the little red light on my phone that connected me via the intercom to my dispatcher,

Ruby, in the other room. If I raised my voice through the open door—even over the drone of the lite-?jazz Christmas carols playing in the background—the reception would be better, but Ruby is a stickler for procedure, so I push the button except for emergencies. I stared out the window at the fat, heavy flakes falling like in a snow globe; it had been windy in the morning, but there hadn't been too many accidents on the county's snow-?covered roadways, and with the updated weather reports, it was looking more and more like it was going to be a peaceful and quiet Christmas—something I rarely got in my business. I had no plans—my undersheriff, Victoria Moretti, and her mother, Lena, had decided to go to Belize for Christmas, and my daughter, Cady, was expecting my first grandchild in January and was too pregnant to travel. I was looking forward to the postholidays when Henry and I would fly to Philadelphia to meet the baby, whose name was to be Lola. I had thought her name was to be Martha after my late wife, but Cady had decided on Lola and that was, as they say, that. I placed my book flat on my desk, words up, the weight of the sentiment holding it open. Taking a sip from my chipped Denver Broncos coffee mug, I punched the button. Do I know her? There was a pause, and then Ruby came back on. She says probably not. I waited, and I guess she felt prompted to add, The young woman is carrying something. Smaller than a bread box but bigger than a subpoena—Walter. I glanced up at the old Seth Thomas on the wall and figured I had another twenty minutes of daylight on the taxpayers dollar. I'm doing my annual holiday reading; where is Saizarbitoria? Checking on a drive-?off at the Kum Go. Or, as Vic liked to call it, the Ejaculate Evacuate. I've also got Lucian on line two; he wants to know if you are still playing chess tonight. I thought about the old Doolittle Raider as I reached down and petted Dog, who was sleeping, lying low in hopes of avoiding the reindeer antlers Ruby sometimes attached to his head. Why, has he succumbed to his usual blue Christmas? Possibly. I thought about how chess night had evolved from Lucian's poker games of yore, how the old Raiders companions had died off one by one, and how he'd been left with only two regular visitors and Dog and I didn't play poker.

Isn't that what old widowers do? Sure, tell him I'll be there. It wasn't what I really wanted to do with my Christmas Eve, but with both Cady and Vic away, I was without female companionship for the holidays. Normally I would've headed out to the Red Pony Bar Grill to spend the evening with my good friend Henry Standing Bear, but he'd been spending time up on the Rocky Boy Reservation with a young divorcee these past couple of weeks—the dog who wouldn't stay on the porch. The season was taking a toll on all of us as it usually did, but I told Ruby to send the woman in. I glanced down at my book and read the line . . . no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused. . . . I patted my ancient copy of A Christmas Carol and stood to accept the visitor. A dark-?haired woman dressed in jeans and a long, elegant black wool coat stood in the doorway—she was clutching a garment bag and smiling a nervous smile, and was small and delicately boned with pale skin and what looked like a hairline crack in the porcelain of her forehead, almost as if she'd been made of china and at one point dropped. Please, come in. She nodded, stepping through the doorway, and studied Dog, who rose, stretched, and yawned. Won't you have a seat? Her hand rested on Dog's head as he sniffed her. I didn't have a lot of time and figured that since it was Christmas Eve, she didn't either. How can I help you? Are you the sheriff of Absaroka County? I am. I spun my hat, which, when not on my head, was in its usual spot on the edge of my desk. And you are? She glanced around my office, her eyes lighting on the Dickens. You haven't finished that book yet? An odd question, but evidently she didn't want to give out with her name. I glanced down at the small, hand-?bound copy with the gilt lettering, a Christmas gift from my father to me when I was fifteen and he thought I needed to understand the goodness of charity and humility. Holiday reading; a tradition of mine. I know. I thought I could discern a slight whistling noise within her voice as she spoke. I stepped around my desk and extended a hand. I'm sorry, but have we met? The smile returned, but her hands still clutched the garment bags black vinyl like talons on a branch; I noticed it had the name of a San Francisco dry cleaning service with an address at Taylor and Clay printed on the front. You don't remember me. The whistling was there again, as if some wind from another time and place punctuated her speech. Studying her face, I could see something familiar there, something from a while back maybe, but nothing I could really identify. I'm sorry, but not really. She looked at her feet, a small puddle of melted slush from her shoes surrounding them, and then back to me. How long have you been the sheriff? It was an odd question from someone who purported to know me. Almost a quarter century. Who was the sheriff before you? Still feeling as if I should recognize her, I answered, A man by the name of Lucian Connally. I watched her face, but there was no recognition there. Do you mind telling me what this is all about, ma'am? Is he around? I smiled. Um, no. Do you have a photograph of him that I could see, please? I stood there, looking down at her, and stuffed my hands in the pockets of my jeans. There weren't any warning bells going off in my head, but the fact that she hadn't given me her name or a specific reason why

she was here was keeping me off balance. I didnt move at first but then stepped past her toward the doorway; Dog padded after me, his claws making clacking sounds on the wide-wood-planked floor of the old Carnegie library that served as our office. I motioned for her to accompany us. Ruby watched as we walked past the painting of Andrew Carnegie himself to the marble landing. I took three steps down and turned so that I could look straight at the young woman, who had maintained a two-foot distance behind me, gesturing toward the wall where the 810s of all the sheriffs of the county since its inception in 1894 hung diagonally in a rogues gallery. Mine was last, with a chocolate-brown hat and the ridiculous mustache and sideburns Id had in the eighties when Id first been elected. The photo was a color monstrosity that looked garish and dclass next to Lucians classic black and white. His had been taken in the late forties a few years after the war?the good one, if there was such a thing. It was right before he lost his leg to Basque bootleggers, and he wore his traditional light-colored Open Road Stetson, a dark tie, and an old Eisenhower jacket, star attached. He was looking straight at the camera with an elbow resting on a raised knee, the other hand drawing the wool back to reveal the .38 service revolver hed carried all those years, the one with the lanyard loop on the butt. He wore a slight smirk with an eyebrow cocked like a Winchester, which gave the impression that, if unsatisfied with the resulting photograph, he was fully prepared to shoot the photographer. I gestured toward the portrait in the cheap filigree discount-store frame. My predecessor, the High Sheriff, Lucian A. Connally. High Sheriff? I glanced up at Ruby, who was watching us intently. An old term they used to use. One of the womans hands disengaged from the garment bag and rose to the glass surface to rest a few fingertips there. Her head dropped a bit, but her eyes stayed on the image of the old warhorse. I felt something pull at me again as I studied her profile, sure that I had seen her before. Drawing on my experience in Vietnam to help me discern Asian features, I could tell she was not Vietnamese or Chinese?Japanese maybe. Miss? She shuddered for an instant, as if Id shocked her by reminding her of my presence, and then turned with tears in her dark eyes. Hes dead? I laughed. Oh God, no . . . I glanced up at Ruby, who continued to study the woman with more than some interest. Even though there are times we wish he were. She didnt seem to know how to take that remark, so I added, He can be kind of a pain in the butt sometimes. She swept a finger across the eyelid that was nearest me and looked back at the photograph as Dog, concerned with the tone of her voice, nudged her with his broad muzzle. I seem to remember that. You know Lucian? She petted Dog in reassurance. Does he live here, in town? I waited a moment before responding, just to be clear that she knew I knew she was not answering my questions. He does. I need to see him. Not I want to see him, or Id like to see him, but I need to see him. Checking in with my ethical barometer, I glanced at Ruby? she looked puzzled but not worried, so I took a step up, leaned a shoulder against the corner of the wall, and stuffed my hands back in my jeans. As Ive said, perhaps if you tell me what this is about? She took a deep breath and hugged the garment bag closer to her chest, and there was that moment of silence when all the air goes out of the room. Her voice whistled with her breath again as she spoke. I have something . . . She looked down. Something that I need to return to him. Revue de presse Praise for Spirit of Steamboat A nail-biter. Publishers Weekly Johnson is a born storyteller, and he spins this old-fashioned adventure tale deftly. An extremely pleasant present for fans of this popular series. Booklist A suspenseful adventure story. Series fans along with adventure and Western readers will raptly devour the details. Library Journal Like flint to stone, the sparks fly and the humour is brilliant and barbed. . . Fresh Fiction Praise for Craig Johnson and the Longmire Series: Like the greatest crime novelists, Johnson is a student of human nature. Walt Longmire is strong but fallible, a man whose devil-may-care stoicism masks a heightened sensitivity to the horrors hes witnessed. Unlike traditional genre novelists who obsess mainly over every hairpin plot turn, Johnsons books are also preoccupied with the mystery of his characters psyches. Los Angeles Times Johnson knows the territory, both fictive and geographical, and tells us about it in prose that crackles. Robert B. Parker The characters talk straight from the hip and the Wyoming landscape is its own kind of eloquence. The New York Times [Walt Longmire] is an easy man to like Johnson evokes the rugged landscape with reverential prose, lending a heady atmosphere to his story. The Philadelphia Inquirer Stepping into Walts world is like slipping on a favorite pair of slippers, and its where those slippers lead that provides a thrill. Johnson pens a series that should become a must read, so curl up, get comfortable, and enjoy the ride. The Denver Post A winning piece of work Theres a convincing feel to the whole package: a sense that youre viewing this territory through the eyes of someone who knows it as adoring lover and skeptical onlooker at the same time. The Washington Post Johnsons pacing is tight and his dialogue snaps. Entertainment Weekly Truly great. Reading Craig Johnson is a treat [He] tells great stories, casts

wonderful characters and writes in a style that compels the reader forward. Wyoming Tribune Eagle