

## Stony Mesa Sagas

### Chip Ward

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*Ward's humorous book uses the American Southwest and its inhabitants to tell a beautiful story about a place, people, and time.*

A small town in the American Southwest and its diverse denizens are the focal point of the three overlapping, intertwining stories of Chip Ward's sardonic, smart, and richly descriptive *Stony Mesa Sagas*.

The suspected murder of a wealthy businessman centers the first story, which introduces memorable characters who inhabit the remainder of the book. They include Luna Waxwing and Hoppy Ziller, two ardent environmentalists who meet and are arrested during a protest, and Elias and Grace Buchman, baby boomers who've chosen to retire in Stony Mesa.

These characters find themselves oftentimes at odds with the locals, people who can proudly and defiantly trace their heritage back several generations. Conflict—whether it's between the old and the new, the educated and not-so-educated, or those who abuse the land and those who wish to maintain it—is an overarching theme and is addressed in a folksy, tongue-in-cheek style by a masterful storyteller.

Each character's history is in-depth and rich, and descriptions of the deserts, valleys, and canyons in and around Stony Mesa are colorful and vivid. The opening chapter is loud and wild, though the tone settles down to a more thoughtful and reverent one in the ensuing pages. The town residents and their actions remain larger than life.

Contemporary topics are explored thoroughly—with both thoughtfulness and rambunctious humor—and include climate change, politics, animals, and food. An omniscient narrator tells it like it really is as townspeople, ranchers, members of the One True Church, environmentalists, and Native Americans adapt to living together.

The time line tilts, and the chronology of events is a bit askew in the first section. There's a bit of an aha moment when the realization of this hits. Also surprising are covert, lightly disguised relationships between various characters, concealed until just the right moments.

*Stony Mesa Sagas* is a smart and humorous take on national topics of interest; it uses the American Southwest and its inhabitants to tell a beautiful story about a place, people, and time.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (November/December 2017)

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