ANIL AGGRAWAL'S

Internet Journal of Book Reviews

A sister journal of AAIJFMT · Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

VOL. 1, NO. 1 · JANUARY – JUNE 2002

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Fault Line

THE BOOK

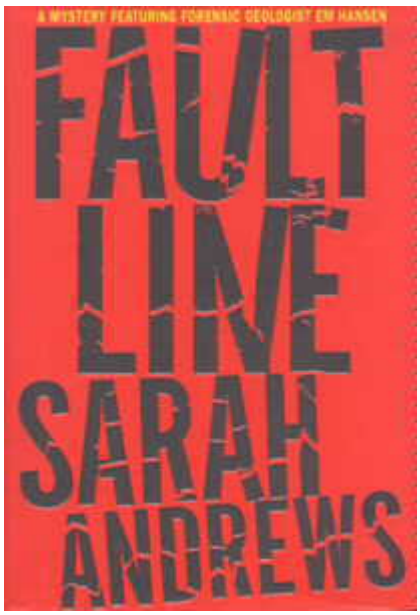
Pages 307
ISBN-10 0-312-25350-8
Price $23.95

HOW TO CITE

Dam S. Review of *Fault Line*. *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews*. 2002;1(1).

AN ACTION PACKED MYSTERY THRILLER

Fault Line *by* Sarah Andrews, paperback
St. Martin's Minotaur, St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010: 307 Pages: ISBN 0-312-25350-8: Price US $23.95, Canada $33.95



FAULT LINE opens with a vivid and comic view of one of the most feared natural disasters that has caused untold loss of life and material to mankind from time immemorial. Though immensely absorbing in its factual depiction of an earthquake that shakes Salt Lake City one wintry morning

measuring 5.2 on the Richter scale, it seemed-not unlike a mystery of great subterfuge-a deceptive opening to a murder mystery involving the gutsy forensic geologist Emily Hansen. But then those already familiar with Sarah Andrews and her heroine would only expect something in a similar line-to expect the unexpected. The seventh in the series of forensic geology mystery, in Fault Line, Sarah Andrews once again delivers a true to form action packed taut thriller that is as much absorbing for the murders that are woven around the earthquake as for the lively descriptions of the incidents and the in depth view one gets about the genesis of an earthquake.

The otherwise hyperactive and charmingly naïve Emily Hansen has just moved into Salt Lake City to be closer to her police boyfriend Ray who is also a Mormon and harbors very deep-rooted family ties and traditions. Emily is trying to come to terms with her own freedom versus the wedded status to a Mormon family that does not suit her own ideas of God and religion. Summoned by her closest friend Faye, who is a pilot and lives on her grandfather's trust in a luxurious house, Emily rushes to find Faye and her boy friend Tom Latimer visibly upset due to an unwanted pregnancy. Tom is a FBI agent and has been grooming Emily on the science of detection.

Amidst all the mayhem that throws the normal life in Salt Lake City out of gear, the State Geologist is found dead, apparently due to a fall from her balcony. The police discover that it was a murder. Someone had strangled the geologist to death and then pushed her off the ledge. Tom summons Emily and puts her on the job. Her assignment was to read some reports at the Salt Lake City Planning department and join the dots as Tom stressed to see if any lead could be discovered about the geologist's murder. Meanwhile a Tribune reporter, Pet Mercer also suspects foul play into the geologist's death and decides to investigate on her own.

Sarah Andrews



Sarah Andrews, a professional geologist and licensed pilot, lives with her husband and son in Northern California. Awarded the prestigious American Association of Petroleum Geologists' Journalists Award in 1998 for her mystery writing, she also teaches geology at Sonoma State University.

Meanwhile Emily's personal life begins to deteriorate as Ray does not return her calls and is never at home. His family too is not very enthusiastic about his wishing to marry Emily, who everyone considers is an outsider. Emily swings between loyalty and love for Ray and her inability to accept the Mormon way of life. Faye and Tom's life too is in turmoil as they are not very sure how to handle the impending child and they go through all the traumas of pain and perturbation. Emily

tries to help Faye cope up with the situation and is equally distressed about her own love life. One day while arriving at Faye's Emily meets an engineering geologist, Logan de Pontier, who gives her some insights into the mechanics of an earthquake. He belonged to the State geology department and knew the departed State Geologist well. Emily takes an instant liking to Pontier and his unassuming charm. Pontier invites Emily and Faye for an evening gathering of geologists.

Unknown to both Emily and Tom, a building inspector, Jim Schecter discovers to his horror that the 5.2 earthquake had caused unimaginable structural damages to the main Olympics stadium that could crash down any moment and cause many deaths.

At the evening gathering of geologists, Emily comes across the Tribune reporter, Pet Mercer, and Wendy, the seismology technician who was also a tenant to the late State Geologist. While parting at the end of the evening, Emily and Pet decide to meet next day to check out the basement isolation system in the City Clock tower that had been installed as a precautionary measure against an earthquake. Later in the same night Ray's sister Katie calls Emily home and contrives to show her that Ray was seeing another woman. When Emily sees Ray with his arms around the woman, she flees the place in utter shock and disbelief.

As the story unfolds, several oddities are brought to the reader's notice. First the now-dead State Geologist, when she was about to reveal some thing about the earthquake's effect on the structural strengths of the stadium she was suddenly cut off from the live TV channel, and later Jim is ordered by his superiors not to file his reports about the stadium damages. Majority of the buildings and Olympic related structures had been constructed by Hayes Associates, in which Ray's mother was a major shareholder and his brother-in-law (Katie's husband, Enos) was an operative. Many of the constructions had been done on or near potential seismic fault lines that could crumple easily and were not earthquake proof, as required by the state regulations. There was huge money at stake and it seemed that the builders would take all necessary steps to keep the buildings from being tagged 'Red', which could include murder. Pet is onto her story and she thinks this bit of investigative journalism could fetch her Pulitzer.

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On the decided day Pet and Emily goes to see the clock tower along with Jim, who reveals that though the tower had been retrofitted for earthquake there were several buildings in the City yet to undergo the same. Eventually Pet learns from Jim about the weld-cracks in the Olympic stadium and that his reports about them have gone unheard and unreported. Pet decides to investigate further. She calls up someone she claims would know what was going on and parted from Emily after reaching an agreement that there definitely were some people with vested interests who did not wish to reveal the damages to the stadium to the public. The mystery deepens further when Pet is killed by her source, ruthlessly run over by a vehicle. Emily tells her suspicions to Tom. Emily suspects some cahoots between Ava and Enos as both were with Faye Associates and had high stakes in the construction business. She feels it her duty and calls up Ray to tell him about her suspicions.

During a child's funeral, who had got mortally injured by a falling bookcase during the earthquake, the stage is set for the climax. Jim challenges Micah Hayes, the owner of Hayes Associates that he

knows how and why the geologist was killed and also about the weld-cracks in the Olympic stadium. Ray and his family look on as Micah dismisses the raving Jim.

The end of the book, set inside the Clock Tower is perhaps the most memorable for its vivid description of a blood-chilling encounter between Emily and the murderer. The sudden twist and the identity of the murderer cannot be revealed in the review for obvious reasons. The story ends in a merry mood as Tom and Faye decide to get married and the bunch of friends take off in Faye's airplane, and finally Emily is able to exorcise her feelings for Ray from her life.



-Satyabrata Dam
Satyabrata Dam is a leading crime fiction writer. His book "Eyewitness and other tales of detection" published by Minerva Press has been hailed as a landmark in Crime fiction.

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-Editor-in-Chief