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Latsis, Mary Jane

Chicago Tribune, Sunday, August 6, 1978

Section 5

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Lifestyle

## Money talks —mystery writers listen

WARREN, N.H. — You'd think bankers would have enough to worry about, with the prime rate soaring, the turmoil in Zaire jeopardizing international credits there, and sour real-estate loans from not-so-many years ago still haunting them.

But what about the person or persons unknown, who laced the chicken served by a national fast-food chain with a poisonous zinc chemical? Or those fake documents that threatened a huge grain sale by the United States to Russia?

These events in various ways involved a bank, namely the Sloan Guaranty Trust, and its senior vice president, John Putnam Thatcher.

IF YOU'VE NEVER heard of Thatcher or the Sloan, it does not mean that you have missed some of the more intriguing stories on the financial pages. It may mean, however, that you are not a mystery novel buff.

For the problems of the Sloan Bank and Thatcher are the fictional work of Emma Lathen. Ms? Miss? Mrs?

Lathen is herself a fiction, the pseudonym of Mary Jane Latsis and Martha Henissart, who tossed together the first two letters of their first names (with a small substitution) and the first three letters of their last names to come up with Emma Lathen.

Their works, in their own way, attest to the importance of banking. Says Latsis: "Banking



New York Times Photo

Henissart (left) and Latsis: Out of the Boston suburbs and into the crime business.

is a very good perch to venture out into various parts of the economy. Where there's money, there's usually a bank."

Latsis and Henissart, who leave their homes in the Boston suburbs and spend two-thirds of their time writing their novels here, are the only mystery novelists whose sleuth operates consistently in a business environment.

WHY BUSINESS? "We deal in a world where most people work," Latsis says, a very real world the authors say most mystery

writers have ignored. "I don't think anyone knew there was an accountant in a mystery story before," she adds. (It does not help to be an accountant in their stories, though. One who unearthed a particularly clever fraud at a cybernetics company was found strangled with the cord from his own adding machine.)

"Basically, we want to write about fraud, and the genre calls for bodies," Latsis says. "The books," Henissart adds, "are about white-collar life with a little crime thrown in."

New York Times News Service