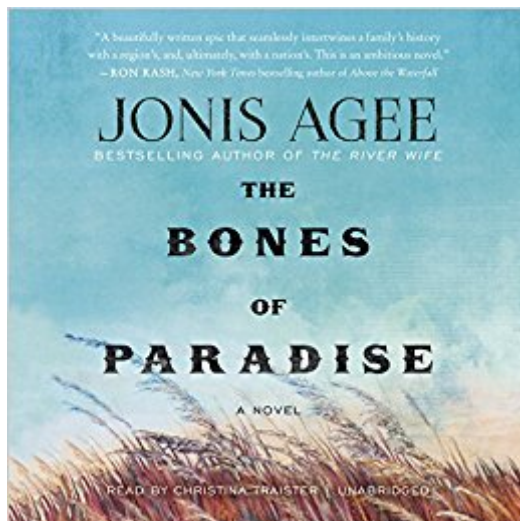


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Bones Of Paradise: A Novel



Synopsis

The award-winning author of *The River Wife* returns with a multigenerational family saga set in the unforgiving Nebraska Sand Hills in the years following the massacre at Wounded Knee -- an ambitious tale of history, vengeance, race, guilt, betrayal, family, and belonging, filled with a vivid cast of characters shaped by violence, love, and a desperate loyalty to the land. Ten years after the Seventh Cavalry massacred more than two hundred Lakota men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, J. B. Bennett, a white rancher, and Star, a young Native American woman, are murdered in a remote meadow on J. B.'s land. The deaths bring together the scattered members of the Bennett family: J. B.'s cunning and hard father, Drum; his estranged wife, Dulcinea; and his teenage sons, Cullen and Hayward. As the mystery of these twin deaths unfolds, the history of the dysfunctional Bennetts and their damning secrets is revealed, exposing the conflicted heart of a nation caught between past and future. At the center of *The Bones of Paradise* are two remarkable women. Dulcinea, returned after bitter years of self-exile, yearns for redemption and the courage to mend her broken family and reclaim the land that is rightfully hers. Rose, scarred by the terrible slaughters that have decimated and dislocated her people, struggles to accept the death of her sister, Star, and refuses to rest until she is avenged. A kaleidoscopic portrait of misfits, schemers, chancers, and dreamers, Jonis Agee's bold novel is a panorama of America at the dawn of a new century. A beautiful evocation of this magnificent, blood-soaked land -- its sweeping prairies, seas of golden grass, and sandy hills, all at the mercy of two unpredictable and terrifying forces, weather and lawlessness -- and the durable men and women who dared to tame it. Intimate and epic, *The Bones of Paradise* is a remarkable achievement: a mystery, a tragedy, a romance, and an unflagging exploration of the beauty and brutality, tenderness and cruelty that defined the settling of the American West.

Book Information

Audio CD: 1 pages

Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers and Blackstone Audio; Unabridged edition (August 2, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1504733703

ISBN-13: 978-1504733700

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1.5 x 5.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (23 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #2,042,700 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #264 in Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Westerns #5879 in Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Unabridged #8101 in Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > General

Customer Reviews

Part family saga, part tragedy, part murder mystery, and wholly captivating, *The Bones of Paradise* is a novel that, once you begin reading, is nearly impossible to lay aside. Jonis Agee transports the reader to the 1880s and Nebraska's Sand Hills as she tells the story of the Bennett family. The massacre at Wounded Knee and the treatment of Native Americans have a significant impact on the narrative and the unexpected developments that occur. A hard, controlling, and dictatorial man, Drum Bennett built his future and his empire on an act of unspeakable cruelty. A bargain with his son and his son's wife results in their family splitting apart. They had both made a devil's pact with a devil. Graver, a defeated homesteader, discovers the bodies of Drum's son J.B. Bennett and Star, a Native American. Wounded, Graver manages to return J.B.'s body to his ranch. When the members of J.B.'s family return to the ranch, their past actions return to haunt them and to taint their relationships. Surprising developments and unexpected twists in the novel propel the story to its conclusion. The characters peopling *The Bones of Paradise* represent a broad spectrum of individuals who settled in the Sand Hills. Jonis Agee includes both personable individuals, who the reader wants to triumph, along with nefarious characters, who evoke disgust in the reader. Like many who settled the West, Drum was escaping his past. Like many, his sins returned to haunt him and his descendants. At one point, J.B.'s wife observes events and concludes, "My God, how we are destroyed." The sly, obsequious attorney Percival Chance may be the novel's most reprehensible individual.

The Bones of Paradise by Jonis Agee can best be described as an epic narrative in the tradition of the great poets of the past. Her setting in the Sand Hills of Nebraska is as vivid as the frozen Northland of the Beowulf Saga or the battlefield of the Trojan War. The involvement of her characters with the gold rush in the Black Hills, the massacre at Wounded Knee, and the machinations of petroleum speculators at the end of the 19th century brings this part of the American Legend into sharp focus. Interwoven with these major events are the purely personal elements of anger, greed, pride and selfishness, and the inevitable tragedies that follow. As the story begins, J.B. Bennett is gunned down while pausing to investigate the body of the Indian girl Star who has been killed by an unknown assailant whom he apparently interrupted in the act of trying to

bury the body. Shortly thereafter, the down-and-out drifter, Graver, comes upon the scene. As he, too, pauses to investigate, he is also shot and wounded, but manages to fake out his assailant who leaves without killing him. J.B.'s ranch hands out looking for their overdue boss come upon the scene, and assume that Graver may have been the killer but are uncertain, so they take him back to the ranch along with J.B.'s body, leaving Star to be found by her sister Rose and taken back to the Lakota Reservation for burial. J.B.'s estranged wife, Dulcinea, comes back to the ranch for the funeral and to try to take care of business. As the plot develops, we learn of the cruelty of J.B.'s father Drum, who coerced Dulcinea to depart the ranch under threat of harm to her husband and sons; Drum has taken over the rearing of the elder boy, Cullen, leaving the younger, Hayward, to be raised by J.B.

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