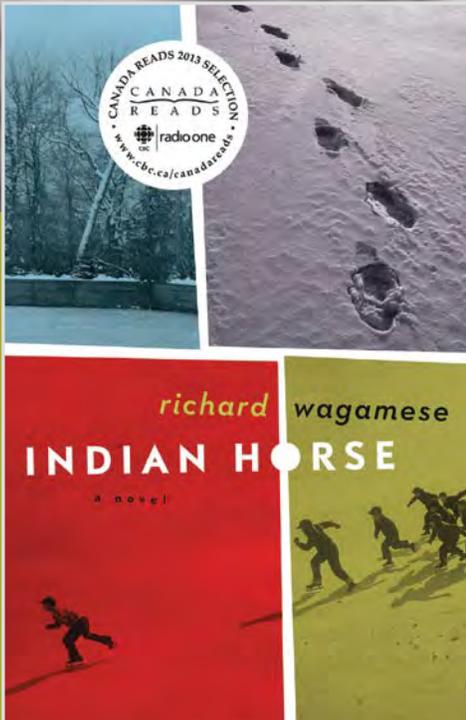


**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL   
**BOOK CLUB**

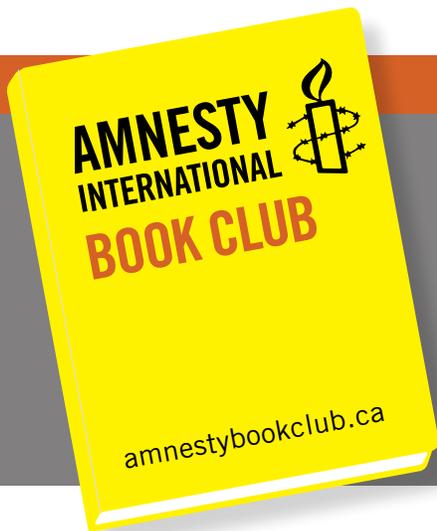


*Indian Horse*

By Richard Wagamese

As selected by guest reader Joseph Boyden

**JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015  
DISCUSSION GUIDE**



# AWARENESS + ACTION = A DIFFERENT KIND OF BOOK CLUB

## Happy New Year Amnesty Book Club members!

This month's book, *Indian Horse*, traces the struggle of a man to maintain his identity and sense of self-worth in the midst of a clash of cultures and a history of betrayal.

Saul Indian Horse has hit rock bottom and is now a reluctant resident in an alcohol treatment centre. Surrounded by people he is certain will never understand him or his journey, he comes to realize he will only find peace in telling his story.

With compassion and insight, author Richard Wagamese traces Saul's life as a member of the Anishinabeg people, forced from his family and the land and sent to a residential school. There he discovers his prowess at hockey, but also the harsh reality of racism and the destructive affects of cultural alienation and displacement.

Our background material and action this month focus on the injustices that the people of Grassy Narrows have suffered for more than 40 years. Despite having their rivers poisoned, their rice beds flooded and their hunting grounds clearcut, the people of Grassy Narrows have remained strong in demanding their rights and defending their community. We hope you will join in their struggle and take action on their behalf.

As the Amnesty International Book Club enters its second year, we are planning to add to the book club experience by hosting webcasts of authors and having a presence at several writers' festivals throughout the year. Stay tuned!

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments, we'd love to hear from you. Just send us an email at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

—The Book Club Team

## About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than three million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

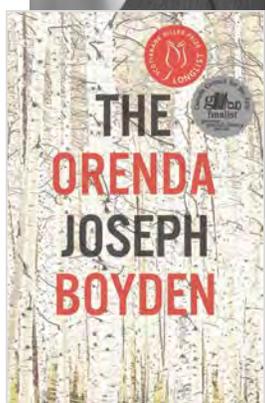
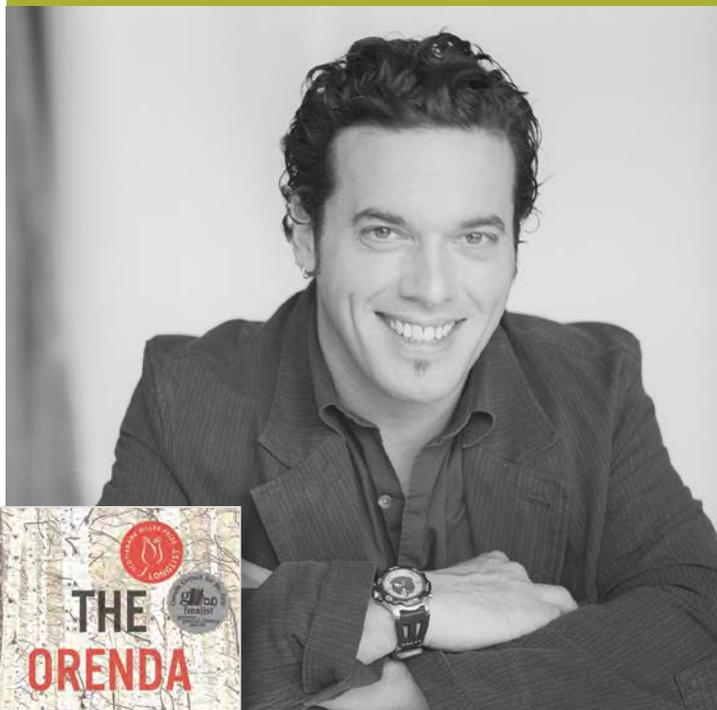
Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit [www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca) or write to us at: **Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.**

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015 BOOK: *Indian Horse*



### About guest reader **Joseph Boyden**

Joseph Boyden's first novel, *Three Day Road*, was selected for the Today Show Book Club, won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, the CBA Libris Fiction Book of the Year Award, the Amazon.ca/Books in Canada First Novel Award, and the McNally Robinson Aboriginal Book of the Year Award. It was also shortlisted for the Governor General's Award for Fiction.

His second novel, *Through Black Spruce*, was awarded the Scotiabank Giller Prize and named the Canadian Booksellers Association Fiction Book of the Year; it also earned him the CBA's Author of the Year Award. His most recent novel, *The Orenda*, won Canada Reads and was nominated for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and the Governor General's Award for Fiction. Boyden divides his time between Northern Ontario and Louisiana.

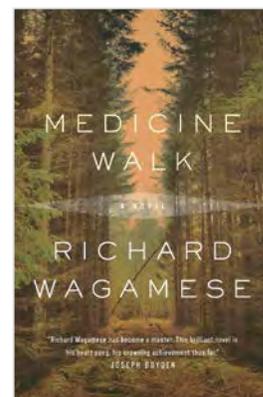


### About this month's author **Richard Wagamese**

Richard Wagamese is Anishinabeg Ojibway from the Wabaseemoong First Nation in Ontario. A member of the Sturgeon Clan, he is one of Canada's foremost authors and journalists. He is the author of six novels, one collection of poetry and three memoirs. His most recent novels, *Indian Horse* (2012) and *Medicine Walk* (2014)

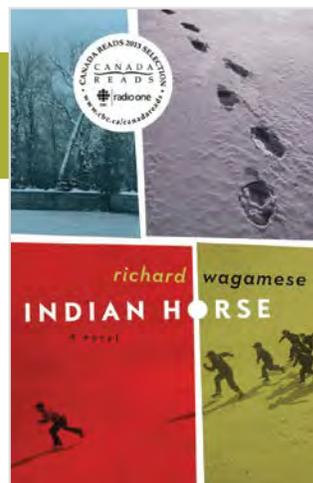
were national bestsellers and published to brilliant reviews.

*Indian Horse* was the People's Choice finalist in the 2013 Canada Reads competition and winner of the First Nation Communities Read Program, as well as the inaugural Burt Award for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Literature. Richard has also been honoured with the 2012 National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Media & Communications and the Molson Prize for the Arts in 2013. He lives in Kamloops, BC.

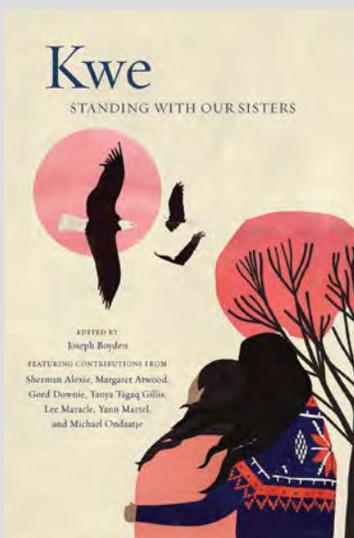


# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 *Indian Horse* evokes a wide range of emotions and reactions. How did you feel at each stage of the novel?
- 2 The novel vividly describes the effects on Saul when he is sent to a residential school. How did reading the novel change your understanding of the residential school system and the lasting harm it has caused?
- 3 Saul feels a strong spiritual connection to his ancestors. What benefits does he derive from this connection?
- 4 Richard Wagamese writes poetically about hockey, describing it as the “snow white stage”. What does hockey mean to Saul? Are all his hockey experiences positive?
- 5 Saul has a strong connection to the land. How is this connection different from what non-Aboriginal people might feel? How is it the same?
- 6 Richard Wagamese is an accomplished storyteller who has performed across the country. Identify the storytelling elements on display in *Indian Horse*.
- 7 In reading *Indian Horse*, what did you learn about Indigenous peoples in Canada that you did not know before?
- 8 *Indian Horse* illustrates some of the ways in which Canada has failed First Nations peoples. Can you think of any other examples?
- 9 What role does redemption play in *Indian Horse*?



## Order *Kwe* online to benefit Amnesty International's No More Stolen Sisters campaign



***Kwe: Standing With Our Sisters*** is a 100-page anthology edited by **Joseph Boyden**, featuring new writing and original artwork from more than fifty contributors, including **Sherman Alexie, Margaret Atwood, Gord Downie, Julie Flett, Tom King, Lee Maracle, Yann Martel, Michael Ondaatje, John Ralston Saul** and **Tanya Tagaq Gillis**. *Kwe* was conceived by Boyden as a way to raise awareness of the crisis facing Indigenous women in Canada.

“The idea for this book was born from feelings of deep frustration, anger, and sorrow in the wake of yet another violent assault upon a First Nations woman,” says Boyden. “This is a call for action. We’re part of a rising chorus in this nation that demands that the federal government respond in a real way. I hope this collection draws much needed attention to the crisis.”

Amnesty International is honoured that Joseph Boyden has chosen to donate the proceeds to support Amnesty International’s work on this issue. **Both Penguin and Chapters/Indigo will give the full sale price of \$2.99 for each ebook to Amnesty International’s No More Stolen Sisters campaign.**

You can purchase it here: <http://www.chapters.indigo.ca/en-ca/books/kwe-kwe/9780143194910-item.html?ikwid=joseph+boyden+kwe&ikwsec=Home&ikwidx=0>

For more information about Amnesty International’s work on this issue, please visit: [www.amnesty.ca/stolensisters](http://www.amnesty.ca/stolensisters)



Amnesty International

## BACKGROUND

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*“My people are from the Fish Clan of the northern Ojibway, the Anishinabeg, we call ourselves. We made our home in the territories along the Winnipeg River, where the river opens wide before crossing into Manitoba after it leaves Lake of the Woods and the rugged spine of Northern Ontario.” —Indian Horse*

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Saul Indian Horse doesn't want to tell his story. But if telling his story means getting out from under the social workers at the New Dawn Treatment Centre, he will do it.

The problem is, for too many years, the “Zhaunagush” (the white colonizers) have not been willing to hear Saul's story. For too many years, the Zhaunagush have been more concerned about plundering the lands

and eliminating the old ways of life. The Zhaunagush have been more interested in imposing their vision of prosperity on this land rather than learn from the history, culture and visions of First Nations.

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*“They come in different ways, them , the Zhaunagush” she said. “Their talk and their stories can sneak you away as quick as their boats.”*

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*Indian Horse* reminds us that the Indigenous peoples who lived on these lands had vibrant communities, with a profound relation to the land. The arrival of the Zhaunagush spurred an ongoing conflict, not just over land, but for the survival of cultures and traditions which bound the First Nations together as peoples.



In 2014, Minamata disease researchers and survivors from Japan visited Grassy Narrows to witness the effects of mercury poisoning.

Saul's story takes place in Northern Ontario on First Nations lands covered by Treaty 3, an agreement signed by First Nations and the Dominion of Canada in 1873. Treaty 3 was one of 11 treaties negotiated soon after Confederation between the federal government and First Nations.

Under the terms of Treaty 3, the First Nation signatories agreed to share with the newcomers approximately 55,000 square miles of forests, lakes and waterways. Treaty 3 recognized the continued right of the First Nations signatories to hunt and fish (harvest) throughout their traditional territory. First Nations entered into Treaty 3 to ensure that coming generations would be able to live according to their traditions in their homeland. However, the Treaty was viewed by Canada as granting the Crown enormous powers over the people and their lands, creating a framework for tension and conflict ever since.

Asubpeeschoseewagong or Grassy Narrows is one of the First Nations of Treaty 3 that have been coping with and

resisting the ongoing and violent dispossession in their homeland since that time.

As noted by Indigenous writer and activist, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, the people of Grassy Narrows like other Indigenous communities in Canada, have experienced the profound harm and loss of their children being forcibly taken away from them in the residential school system. They have maintained their community through successive versions of the Indian Act, which at times:

- restricted their movements on and off the reserve
- denied women their status rights in their own communities
- made it illegal for them to hire lawyers or organize politically.

They have maintained their identity as Anishnabeg people despite being corralled into the reserve system, having their rice beds flooded for hydroelectric

development and having their community relocated for the convenience of the government.

Then between 1962 and 1970, an upstream paper mill in Dryden, Ontario dumped more than nine metric tons of untreated inorganic mercury into the English and Wabigoon Rivers in Northwestern Ontario, destroying the lifeblood of local Anishinaabe people.

The impact of this contamination is still being felt in the bodies, hearts and minds of the people from the Grassy Narrows, Wabaseemoong (Whitedog) and Wabauskang First Nations.

Forty years later, the mercury is not out of the ecosystem and it is still causing severe health problems on the land and the people. Children born long after the mercury was supposed to have gone away are suffering from debilitating developmental problems linked to mercury poisoning.

Unfortunately, this is not the only threat the people of Grassy Narrows are facing. In the 1990s, widespread clear cut logging destroyed trap lines, damaged hunting grounds and threatened areas important for gathering berries and plant medicines and conducting ceremonies.

The people of Grassy Narrows responded by organizing and maintaining the longest-running logging blockade in Canadian history. They have fought the dismissal of their treaty rights in court. They have done endless media interviews, workshops and educational campaigns designed to educate Canadians about these injustices. They also took their fight to the companies processing the wood and selling the products. And eventually they won a tremendous victory. As company after company pulled out, clear cut logging was halted on their traditional territory and the province was forced to the negotiation table.



An example of the clear cut logging in the Grassy Narrows traditional territory.

Yet despite this victory, the province has never given up the idea of restarting clear cut logging. The province's latest forest plan for the region calls for just that. And in December 2014, the province of Ontario rejected a request from the Grassy Narrows First Nation to conduct an environmental assessment into the impact of clear-cut logging on Grassy Narrows. This is despite serious concerns that such logging could lead to the introduction of even more mercury into the rivers through run-off.

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*"It seems that our health and our culture do not matter to the government,"* —Chief Roger Fobister Sr., Grassy Narrows First Nations.

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Grassy Narrows vociferously objects to the logging plan. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the jurisdiction to issue licenses for logging on the treaty lands, but must comply with the duty to consult and accommodate First Nations' rights and interests beforehand. The people of Grassy Narrows say the province has never met this duty.

Amnesty International believes it's time to stop repeating the mistakes of the past. To respect the rights of the people of Grassy Narrows, and to allow the community to restore their health and self-sufficiency, there should be no clear-cut logging or other large-scale industrial development on their traditional lands against the wishes of the people of Grassy Narrows.



**Above:** Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada, Alex Neve (centre) meets with members of the Grassy Narrows First Nation.

**Right:** Image from Amnesty's campaign

We believe that the province must meet this standard of free, prior and informed consent to fulfill the legal obligations under both Canadian and international law and to meet the debt of justice owed to the people of Grassy Narrows.

Saul Indian Horse tells us a story which is hard to hear; but now that we know this story we can respond. We can't undo the years of systemic racism, but we can embrace the visions and dreams of First Nations people when they signed the treaties. We can stand by them as they seek to protect their self-determination as nations and help to forge with them a mutually beneficial relationship based on respect.



## TAKE ACTION NOW

Amnesty International has long campaigned for the province to respect the moratorium on logging called for by the people of Grassy Narrows. This community, which has already suffered massive disruption and loss from mercury contamination of their river system, as well as other harmful effects of government policy, deserves the highest standard of human rights protection.

Please write a letter to Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne urging the province to at long last respect and uphold the rights of the people of Grassy Narrows.

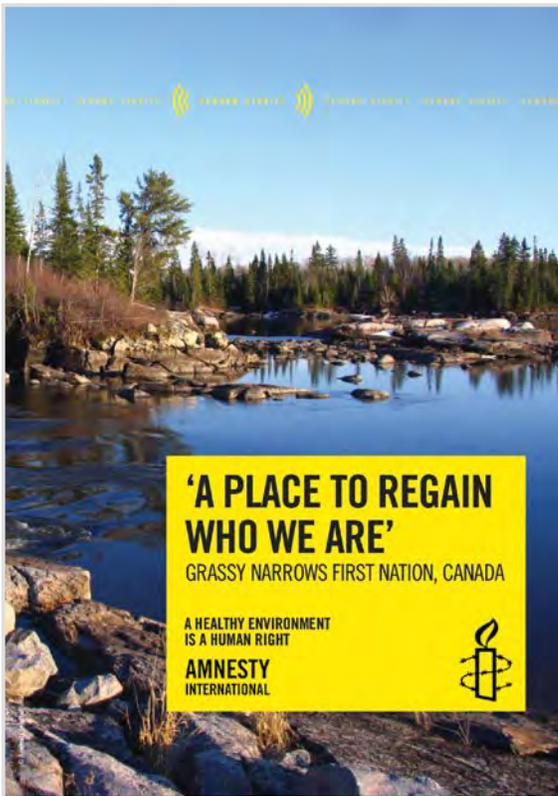
Writing a letter in your own words is more powerful, but if you need help getting started, here is a sample letter you can use.

*Dear Premier Wynne,*

*The people of Asubpeeschoseewagong (Grassy Narrows) have suffered decades of injustice.*

*As community leaders have long stressed, control over and use of the forest is critical to finding a path out of the severe poverty, ill-health and cultural loss that has been inflicted upon the people of Grassy Narrows.*

*I stand with the people of Grassy Narrows in calling for ongoing, community-run monitoring of their waters and respect for their right to say no to unwanted forms of development on their traditional territory.*



See our report 'A place to regain who we are':  
*Grassy Narrows First Nation, Canada.*

[www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/grassy-narrows](http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/issues/indigenous-peoples/grassy-narrows)

## More about this issue

To learn more about the situation in Grassy Narrows, go to:

[www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/12/29/ontario\\_gives\\_green\\_light\\_to\\_clearcutting\\_at\\_grassy\\_narrows.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/12/29/ontario_gives_green_light_to_clearcutting_at_grassy_narrows.html)

<http://freegrassy.net/learn-more/>

[www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/environment/pollution/mercury-rising-the-poisoning-of-grassy-narrows/still-ill.html](http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/environment/pollution/mercury-rising-the-poisoning-of-grassy-narrows/still-ill.html)

[www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/grassy-narrows-first-nation-not-victims-says-advocate-1.2721974](http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/grassy-narrows-first-nation-not-victims-says-advocate-1.2721974)

### WRITE TO:

Kathleen Wynne, Premier  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

### EMAIL:

[premier@ontario.ca](mailto:premier@ontario.ca)

## COMING UP IN MARCH 2015

### *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*

By Gil Courtemanche

Translated by Patricia Claxton

Recommended by guest reader Shani Mootoo

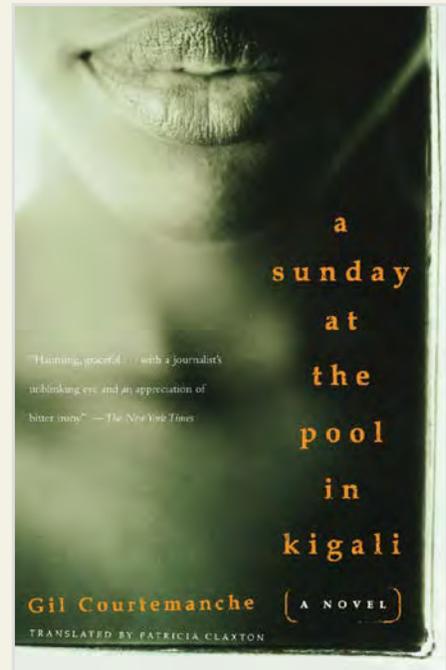


Set against the genocide in Rwanda, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* is also a love story that addresses other issues, such as the ravages that AIDS has brought on Africa. Bernard Valcourt, a documentary filmmaker from Québec, is setting up a television station in Kigali when he falls in love with a Rwandan girl, Gentille, who is an ethnic Hutu but who often passes for a Tutsi. The two marry but as the Hutu government encourages violence against Tutsis, Gentille's life is put in danger. Valcourt refuses to

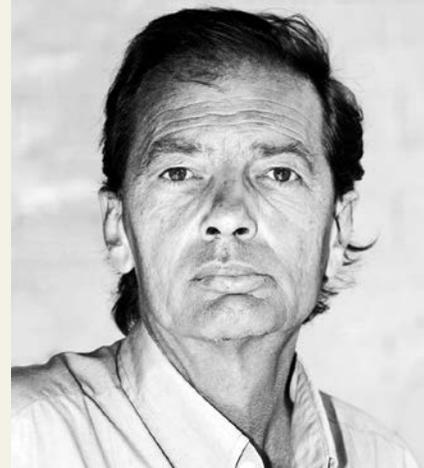
leave Rwanda, but he and Gentille become tragically separated. Valcourt believes she has been killed and sets out to record her life story and the events of her final days.

**The discussion guide will be sent out in early March.**

In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).



Author **Gil Courtemanche**



### Join the conversation at Goodreads!

Find the Amnesty International Book Club group on Goodreads, a website where book lovers go to share ideas and recommendations about books.

To join the conversation and register your views, go to [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com).

**Make your views known about the books we read.**

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