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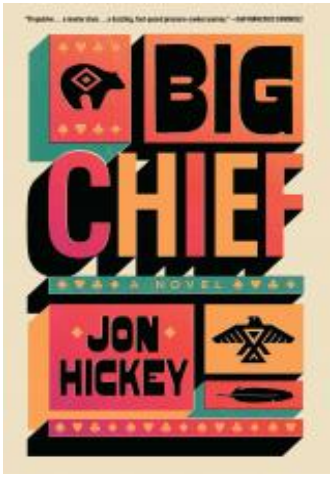
Big Chief

by Jon Hickey



About the Book

THERE THERE meets THE NIGHT WATCHMAN in this gripping literary debut about power and corruption, family, and facing the ghosts of the past.

Mitch Caddo, a young law school graduate and an aspiring political fixer, is an outsider in the homeland of his Anishinaabe ancestors. But alongside his childhood friend, Tribal President Mack Beck, he runs the government of the Passage Rouge Nation and the tribe?s Golden Eagle Casino and Hotel. On the eve of Mack?s reelection, their tenuous grip on power is threatened by a nationally known activist and politician, Gloria Hawkins, and her young aide, Layla Beck, none other than Mack?s estranged sister and Mitch?s former love. In their struggle for control over Passage Rouge, the campaigns resort to bare-knuckle political gamesmanship, testing the limits of how far they will go --- and what they will sacrifice --- to win it all.

But when an accident claims the life of Mitch?s mentor, a power broker in the reservation?s political scene, the election slides into chaos and pits Mitch against the only family he has. As relationships strain to their breaking points and a peaceful protest threatens to become an all-consuming riot, Mitch and Layla must work together to stop the reservation?s descent into violence.

Thrilling and timely, BIG CHIEF is an unforgettable story about the search for belonging --- to an ancestral and spiritual home, to a family, and to a sovereign people at a moment of great historical importance.

Discussion Guide

1. How does Mitch's dual identity as a Native American and a law school graduate shape his perspective on the reservation and its politics?

2. In what ways does the history of the Passage Rouge Reservation influence the present-day conflicts and tensions?

3. How do family relationships, both blood and chosen, impact Mitch's decisions and actions throughout the novel?

4. How does corruption manifest within the reservation's political system, and what are the consequences for the community? Is corruption merited to further advance the initiatives of the reservation?

5. What challenges does the reservation face in asserting its sovereignty, and how do external forces threaten its autonomy?

6. How does the issue of environmental protection intersect with tribal sovereignty and economic development?

7. What are Mitch's strengths and weaknesses as a leader and as a person? How does he evolve throughout the novel?

8. What motivates Mack's political ambitions, and how does his leadership style contribute to the reservation's challenges?

9. What is Layla's role in the political landscape of the reservation, and how does she navigate the complexities of family and activism? Are there choices she makes that you agree and/or disagree with?

10. To what extent are Mitch's actions justified in the pursuit of justice and change?

11. What are the potential consequences of the political upheaval depicted in the novel for the future of the Passage Rouge Reservation? Do you see similar geopolitical situations unfolding in your region? The country? The world?

12. How does the author employ literary devices like symbolism and foreshadowing to enhance the narrative and bolster themes of BIG CHIEF? What other literary devices are employed in the book?

Author Bio

Jon Hickey earned his MFA at Cornell University and was a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University. He has received scholarships from the Bread Loaf Writers Conference and the Sewanee Writers Conference, and he is an enrolled member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians. Jon lives in San Francisco with his wife and two sons.

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