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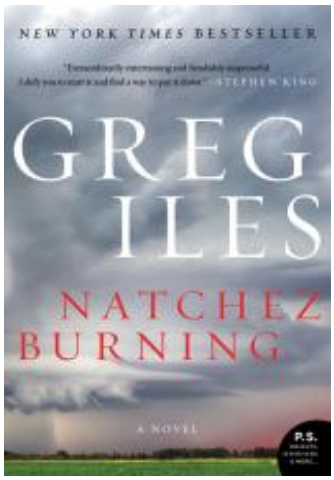
Natchez Burning

by Greg Iles



About the Book

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Greg Iles returns with his most eagerly anticipated novel yet and his first in five years --- NATCHEZ BURNING ---the first installment in an epic trilogy that interweaves crimes, lies and secrets past and present in a mesmerizing thriller featuring Southern lawyer and former prosecutor Penn Cage.

Growing up in the rural Southern hamlet of Natchez, Mississippi, Penn Cage learned everything he knows about honor and duty from his father, Tom Cage. But now the beloved family doctor and pillar of the community is accused of murdering Violet Turner, the beautiful nurse with whom he worked in the dark days of the early 1960s. A fighter who has always stood for justice, Penn is determined to save his father, even though Tom, stubbornly evoking doctor-patient privilege, refuses to speak up in his own defense.

The quest for answers sends Penn deep into the past --- into the heart of a conspiracy of greed and murder involving the Double Eagles, a vicious KKK crew headed by one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the state. With the aid of a local friend and reporter privy to some of Natchez's oldest and deadliest secrets, Penn follows a bloody trail that stretches back 40 years, to one undeniable fact: no one --- black or white, young or old, brave or not --- is ever truly safe.

With everything on the line, including his own life, Penn must decide how far he will go to protect those he loves?and see justice done, once and for all.

Rich in Southern atmosphere and electrifying plot turns, NATCHEZ BURNING marks the brilliant return of a genuine American master of suspense. Tense and disturbing, it is the most explosive, exciting, sexy, and ambitious story Greg Iles has written yet.

Discussion Guide

1. One critic described Greg Iles' writing in NATCHEZ BURNING as William Faulkner ?for the ?Breaking Bad? generation." How does NATCHEZ BURNING fit into that comparison?

2. Iles dealt with his own personal tragedy when his life was nearly lost in an auto accident in 2011. During his recovery, he wrote the latest trilogy featuring Penn Cage, of which NATCHEZ BURNING is the first installment. What personal trials of his own does Penn have to fight through in this novel?

3. Even though this is the start of a trilogy with Penn, he has been the protagonist of three previous novels --- THE QUIET GAME, TURNING ANGEL and THE DEVIL?S PUNCHBOWL. What are the challenges in developing a lead character in a dramatic series?

4. There are many secrets described in this book. Dr. Tom Cage has held one from his past for decades, and it?s one of the most damaging in the novel. How does Penn deal with it in the present?

5. Discuss the sociological and political landscape in Natchez, Mississippi, from the turbulent 1960s as well as the present. Does this novel show any progress in these areas, or are the characters doomed to suffer from their own personal histories?

6. Penn is an attorney, and his father is a physician. What is the impact of these professions on the plot, and do they produce limitations for these men?

7. What do you think is more important to Penn --- protecting those he loves, or seeing that justice is done?

8. There are several twists and turns that keep the plot driving forward. What do you think is the most significant plot twist, and is Penn able to recover from and move beyond it?

9. NATCHEZ BURNING is unlike most thrillers in its length and the fact that it will remind some of classic literary fiction. What other thrillers would you compare it to?

10. What symbolic role does the Ku Klux Klan play in this story --- both in the present and in flashbacks?

11. What do you think will happen to Penn Cage and his family in the second and third novels in this trilogy, THE BONE TREE and UNWRITTEN LAWS? What would you like to see happen to these characters and to Natchez?

12. What do you think makes NATCHEZ BURNING such a recognizable Southern tale? Is there a unique, recognizable quality to Southern novels and novelists?

Author Bio

Greg Iles spent most of his life in Natchez, Mississippi. His first novel, SPANDEAU PHOENIX, was the first of many *New York Times* bestsellers. His *Natchez Burning* trilogy continued the story of Penn Cage, the protagonist of THE QUIET GAME, TURNING ANGEL and #1 *New York Times* bestseller THE DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL. Iles? novels

have been made into films and published in more than 35 countries. He was a member of the lit-rock group The Rock Bottom Remainders. Iles passed away in August 2025 at the age of 65 following a long battle with multiple myeloma.

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