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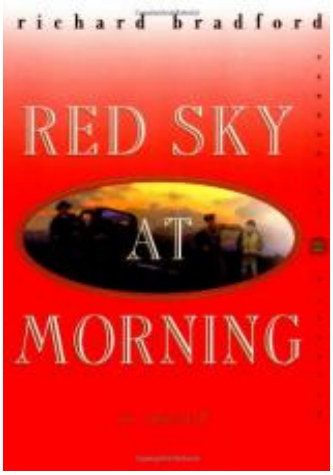
Red Sky at Morning

by Richard Bradford



About the Book

In the summer of 1944, Frank Arnold, a wealthy shipbuilder in Mobile, Alabama, receives his volunteer commission in the U.S. Navy and moves his wife, Ann, and seventeen-year-old son, Josh, to the family's summer home in the village of Corazon Sagrado, high in the New Mexico mountains. A true daughter of the Confederacy, "wrapped up in tissue paper like a Wedgwood egg cup," Mrs. Arnold finds it impossible to cope with the quality of life in the largely Hispanic village and, in the company of Jimbob Buel--an insufferable, Virginia-born, South-proud professional houseguest--takes to bridge and sherry. Josh, more the son of his Baltimore-raised father than of his class-conscious, Old South mother, becomes an integral member of the Sagrado community, forging friendships with classmates at Helen De Crispin school, with the town's disreputable resident artist, with Chango Lopez--macho bully turned model student--and with Amadeo and Excilda Montoya, the couple hired by his father to care for their house. Josh narrates the story of his fateful year in Sagrado and, with deadpan, irreverent humor, reveals the events and people who influence his progress to maturity. Unhindered by his mother's disdain for these "tacky, dusty little Westerners," Josh comes into his own and into a young man's finely formed understanding of duty, responsibility, and love. One of America's finest coming-of-age novels, *Red Sky at Morning* remains a "first novel to rejoice in" (Harper's) and "a novel of consequence" (New York Times Book Review).

Discussion Guide

1. How does Bradford portray racial prejudice? How do relations among different ethnic groups in Sagrado differ from those in Mobile? What is the significance of--and some of the confusions and consequences related to--Steenie's classification of people in Sagrado as Anglo, Native, and Indian?

2. How would you describe Josh's father and his relationship with his son? What role does Frank Arnold play in Josh's life? Are his presence at the novel's beginning and his few letters to Josh sufficient to establish and maintain his presence

as a force in Josh's life?

3. Are Bradford's "Native" characters--the Montoyas, Sheriff Chamaco, Chango Lopez, and others--fully realized individuals? To what extent do they provide a clear understanding of the life, traditions, and history of Sagrado?

4. What differences between life in Sagrado and life in Mobile are critical to the story and to Josh's character and coming to maturity? How does Josh deal with those differences?

5. Do we learn enough about Ann Arnold's life and attitudes to adequately understand her reaction to living in Sagrado? In what ways would the story have been different if told from her perspective? Can you sympathize with her unhappiness and her inability, or refusal, to adapt to life in Sagrado?

6. What is the significance of the novel's title, in addition to its popular reference ("Red sky at morning, sailors take warning")? In what ways does the title apply to Josh and to the story's development? What should give the novel's characters cause to take warning?

7. What is the sequence of events, experiences, and insights that make up Josh's progress toward moral, emotional, and intellectual maturity? How do others--family, friends, teachers, and other residents of Sagrado--influence that progress? What does he learn from each?

8. What feelings and values are associated with Bradford's presentation of the New Mexico landscape? What is the significance of Romeo Bonino's returning his carved boulders to the mountain clearing? Do you agree with his explanation of why he returns the boulders?

9. What purpose is served by Josh's Christmas visit with Amadeo and Victoria to the mountain village of La Cima? To what extent does the lawlessness of La Cima throw into relief the need for a social order based on law, mutually beneficial communal behavior, and a recognition of everyone's humanity?

10. What attitudes, behaviors, and expressed beliefs and values of the men, women, and children of Sagrado provide a persuasive picture of the kind of lives they lead and aspire to? What is the significance of Victoria's revelation--to Jimbob's consternation--that her family has been in Sagrado since 1598?

11. Josh explains to Mr. Gunther that he believes his father's reference to "Sage Counsel" "means the counsel of Amadeo and Excilda, since they're both pretty sage." Is Josh correct? What about the Montoyas' life and outlook might explain Josh's trust in them?

Author Bio

> "Bradford believes in the human comedy the way DiMaggio believes in baseball, the way Nureyev believes in the dance, the way people, no matter what, believe in laughing when they might just as well be weeping."

--Richard Condon, author of *The Manchurian Candidate* and*Prizzi's Honor*

Born in 1932, Richard Bradford has spent most of his adult life in New Mexico, a landscape to which he pays homage in both of his novels, *Red Sky at Morning* and *So Far from Heaven*. Before the 1968 publication of *Red Sky at Morning*--which many reviewers favorably compared to such coming-of-age novels as *The Catcher in the Rye* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*--Bradford had worked as a technical writer, a promoter of tourism, and an environmental-impact analyst.

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