

Natchez Burning

William Morrow

By Greg Iles

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Introduction

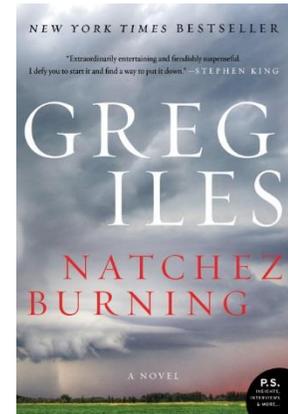
Raised in the southern splendor of Natchez, Mississippi, Penn Cage learned all he knows of duty from his father, Dr. Tom Cage. But now the beloved family doctor has been accused of murdering the African American nurse with whom he worked in the dark days of the 1960s. Once a crusading prosecutor, Penn is determined to save his father, but Tom, stubbornly invoking doctor-patient privilege, refuses even to speak in his own defense.

Penn's quest for the truth sends him deep into his father's past, where a sexually charged secret lies. More chilling, this long-buried sin is only one thread in a conspiracy of greed and murder involving the vicious Double Eagles, an offshoot of the KKK controlled by some of the most powerful men in the state. Aided by a dedicated reporter privy to Natchez's oldest secrets and by his fiancée, Caitlin Masters, Penn uncovers a trail of corruption and brutality that places his family squarely in the Double Eagles' crosshairs.

With every step costing blood and faith, Penn is forced to confront the most wrenching dilemma of his life: Does a man of honor choose his father or the truth?

Questions for Discussion

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?