

TIMEKEEPER

By John Atkinson

5 Stars (Highest Rating)

An Important New Coming of Age Novel: An Important New Author

'It's more humane to face a firing squad than a classroom, humiliated because of illiteracy.' This opening sentence of TIMEKEEPER by new author (to this reader) John Atkinson begins a journey so deeply moving and profound, yet so utterly simply told that the book suggests Atkinson may enter the echelon of writers known for important Coming of Age novels. Such writers whose message and transference is tangential include James Joyce's 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man', Betty Smith's 'A Tree Grows in Brooklyn', JD Salinger's 'Catcher in the Rye', Robert McCammon's 'Boy's Life', Cormac McCarthy's 'All the Pretty Horses', Sue Monk Kidd's 'The Secret Life of Bees', Jamie O'Neill's 'At Swim, Two Boys' – a rather disparate group of books in style but related in topic - and I'm sure every reader has others of equal impact. Time, of course, will determine his longevity of importance, but at the moment John Atkinson appears to be a new voice whose book should find a very wide audience.

Johnnyboy is a 14-year-old sensitive, handsome, sadly illiterate half-breed Indian who flees his severely dysfunctional Virginia family – his helpless but loving Cherokee Mama and his physically abusive father Bugdaddy – to find his place in the universe. His journey on foot and by car introduces him to Chief, a wise old Indian who sees into Johnnyboy's soul and with the aid of hallucinogenic mescal introduces the now named Timekeeper to the ways toward the path of life. The book is a road trip peppered with people, both kind and wise and evil and ignorant, who offer Timekeeper valuable lessons, both occult and temporal, as Timekeeper searches for his true identity and purpose. His constant companion is Check, a gray dog who seems from another time plane but who becomes Timekeeper's confidant and protector. Timekeeper's search reaches a tense denouement and a poignant climax as the now solitary lad accepts his place and purpose in the windswept soul of the Universal spirit. It is a journey fraught with hardship, danger, comic relief, heartwarming encounters, and above all the discovery of a boy becoming a man who accepts the gifts of the people who touch his life. If at the end of the book the Epilogue strains to tie the book together, somewhat negating the reader's perceptions and involvement in the process of coming of age, that is a minor flaw and one that many readers will find tender and satisfying.

John Atkinson is able to relate this story in the first person, and as Timekeeper is illiterate and nearly childlike in his beginning, the style of writing fits the character like a glove. As Timekeeper matures during his journey, so does the writing style, becoming far more rich in the etching of atmosphere and the terrain of the country Timekeeper and Check traverse. That is a difficult feat and Atkinson

proves it can be done. This is an important book from an important writer. It will be very interesting to see where he goes from this auspicious debut.

Reviewed by Grady Harp, Amazon Top 7 Reviewer