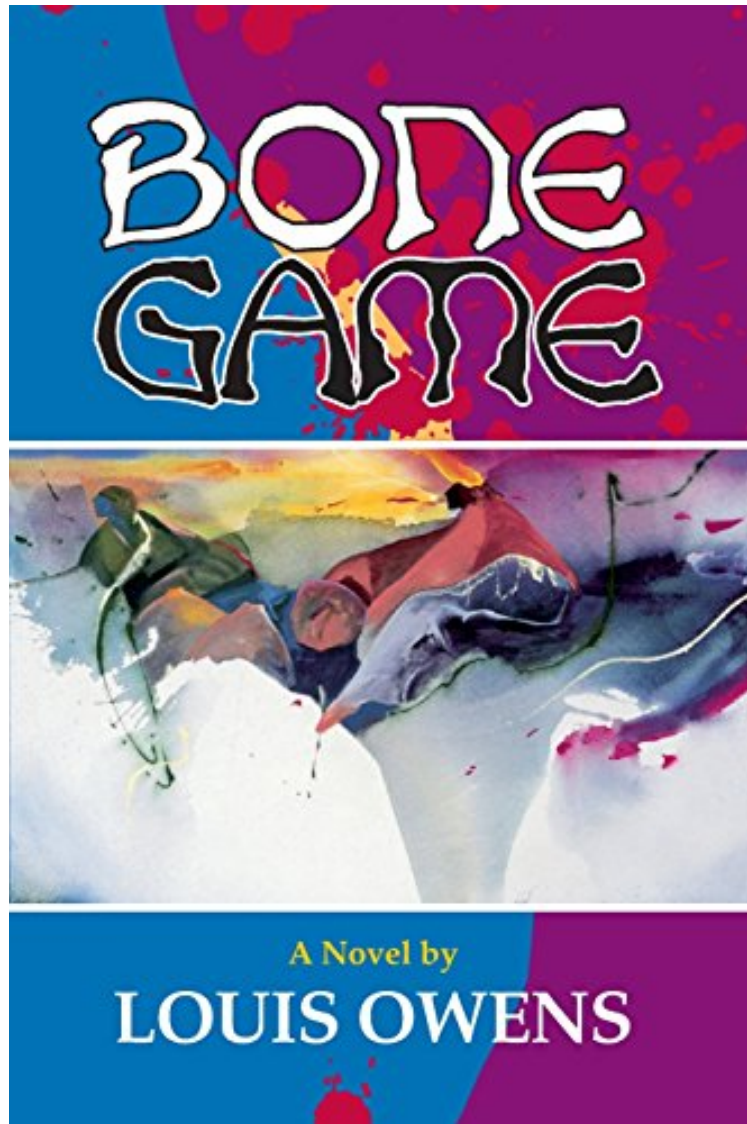


(Free) Bone Game: A Novel (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series)

## Bone Game: A Novel (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series)

*Louis Owens*

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**Louis Owens : Bone Game: A Novel (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bone Game: A Novel (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Finally Someone Mentions Native Californians By "Ian Herrick" The whole history of the oppression of Native Californians is not widely known or spoken of, even in California (I still hear

that misbelief that the missions were good for the Indians occasionally -- don't get me started. And unfortunately, many times people aren't even aware that native peoples such as the Ohlone that figure into Owens' book still exist (they were, after all, declared extinct by anthropologists like Alfred Kroeber, which is extremely untrue). So I commend Owens for drawing upon the rich history of California in a way I have not seen many other authors do. Plenty of books rely on the premise of the wronged native -- most deal with horse-back riding Plains Indians with names like "Big Wolf" or "Two Eagles." As for plot, and story, Owens scores here as well. I notice that many other reviewers found the plot line confusing, which in turn confuses me as I found it easy to follow. I even figured out that there were two...well, I don't want to spoil it for you. Owens also has good descriptions of the local scenery -- the redwoods forests of the Santa Cruz mountains as well as the juniper-pinyon forests of New Mexico - that come through as authentic to any who has ever walked in those places. It's too bad Owens isn't still around producing works like these. 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. SurrealBy Jeffrey Leach

After reading the novel *Bone Game*, a common reaction of many readers must be confusion. There are so many visions and dreams in this novel. These visions seem to occur independent of time and space, leading a reader used to highly structured "Western" novels to throw up their hands in futility. On reflection, however, several themes can be discerned from this confusing novel. One overarching theme seems to be the pervasive force of evil that manifests itself throughout the book. Louis Owens definitely has a grasp of criminal history. He has borrowed from real life events to construct his novel. Most of the events in *Bone Game* occur at the University of California, Santa Cruz where Cole McCurtain works as a professor. During the early 1970's Santa Cruz suffered through a crime wave when three serial killers committed crimes there. Herbert William Mullin was, by anybody's account, a strange bean. A heavy user of LSD and a frequent pot smoker, Mullin eventually suffered a serious psychological collapse. He began hearing voices that commanded him to kill people in order to prevent earthquakes from destroying Southern California. Edmund Kemper embarked on a sadistic rampage of murder and mayhem that culminated with his arrest in Pueblo, Colorado in April 1973. Kemper was a giant of a man, 6'9" tall and 280 pounds. Inside lurked a monster. Kemper despised women, especially his mother. When Kemper began to hunt women, his mother, a UCSC employee, inadvertently aided her son's murderous desires by providing him with a parking sticker for his car. This sticker allowed Kemper to lure young college co-eds to their deaths. After killing his victims, Kemper dismembered their bodies and decapitated them. Kemper buried one particular head in the yard outside his room, with the head facing towards the house so he could "talk" to his victim. The third killer was John Linley Frazier. Frazier's spree was limited to a single event in 1970, when he torched the house of a local doctor. Frazier left a note at the crime scene expressing his outrage at the exploitation of the ecosystem and the rampant materialism prevalent in American society. When arrested, it was discovered that Frazier was a rabid ecologist and a practitioner of Tarot cards. Police believed that the murders Frazier committed might have been linked to the hippie culture movement that existed in the surrounding areas of Santa Cruz. This lengthy description of madness is not an attempt to skirt discussion of *Bone Game*. Rather, Owens uses these real events to create fictional characters that adopt, and ultimately subvert, Indian culture. Can any reader look at the hulking figure of Paul Kantner and not see Ed Kemper? The murderer in *Bone Game* uses a car with a UCSC parking sticker to pick up one of his female victims. Kantner even murders his mother in the same way Kemper killed his mother. Paul also admits to burying the head of one of his victims so that it faces his room, allowing him to talk to the head. Again, this is the same thing that Kemper did. Herbert Mullin and John Frazier are also represented in the story. Robert Malin, Cole's graduate assistant, seems to possess some of Mullin's attributes. Both Mullin and Malin (the names again share a similarity) engage in hallucinogenic experiences. Mullin takes acid and Malin takes part in the peyote ceremony. Mullin's experience with hallucinogens does not have the spiritual and healthy connotations of an Indian peyote ritual. Instead of receiving visions helpful and cleansing visions, Mullin's visions are nightmares of depravity that lead to murder. Even Robert does not share in the healthy experience of the ritual because he runs out before the ritual is finished. Robert talks about his "dreams" to kill, closely resembling Mullin's own sadistic visions. It is also important to point out that Malin seems to have adopted Mullin's fascination with earthquakes, as can be seen when he talks to Abby after he has abducted her. Frazier's fascination with ecology and the prevention of materialistic consumption are both ideas that are closely associated with Indian values. In the hands of Frazier, they become twisted beyond recognition and turned into a reason for murder and destruction. The hippie culture that Frazier was immersed in also presents a problem. The hippie culture attempted to co-opt many Indian ideas, especially the concept of community. While this may seem to be a noble goal, in the hands of Whites it had a propensity to occasionally produce a John Frazier or a Charles Manson. The hippie culture that Frazier was a part of actually does make an appearance in *Bone Game*, when Paul takes Abby to a place called Elfland. Elfland is a place where white students go to take part in wacky "New Age" rituals. These rituals are actually pathetic attempts by Whites to copy Indian ritual. Another important event in *Bone Game* that illustrates the idea of subversion deals with the Indians themselves, as people. Luther and Hoey run into a gang of criminals who deal in a sort of Indian slavery. The evil committed against the Indians here is twofold: not only is an Indian abducted and denied dignity as a human being by Whites, the Whites have also turned Indian against Indian. One of the gang is an Indian who has nothing but contempt for his own people. A weird book but worth reading if you like Indian literature. 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Mysterious, surreal, almost incomprehensible  
By A Customer  
I ran across this book in my search for mysteries written by Native Americans. The jacket blurb and book reviews made it sound intriguing and worth picking up to read. The story line weaves back and forth between murders set in present day California and Spanish Colonial times. Owens prose is haunting; his images catch just at the edge of the reader's mind. Ok, one asks, is this happening today? Or 300 years ago? Is it real? (whatever that means.) Or just one of the protagonist's screwy dreams? Frankly, I got exhausted trying to figure out where and when I was supposed to be. I fought my way through several hundred pages, searching for a plot I could hang on to. We finally got there, but by that time I had become bored with Cole - the angst-ridden, usually drunk, central character. Maybe I'm just old fashioned - I like my mysteries to unfold in a more or less straight line. Too much poetry, imagery, and symbolism for my taste.

Bone Game is a murder mystery on a grand scale. Cole McCurtain, a mixed-blood Indian professor of Indian Studies at Santa Cruz, California, is haunted by dreams dating back to events of Spanish California. Images of a Spanish priest murdered in 1812, a rearing grizzly bear, and a black-and-white painted Indian who offers bones in his extended hands come at a time when dismembered pieces of a young woman are washing ashore in 1993. The dreams become increasingly urgent as the murders become more frequent, and Cole's family and friends gather to help-including Choctaw relatives who travel west from Mississippi because "this story's so big, Cole sees only a little bit of it."

From Publishers Weekly  
Owens, who teaches English at the University of New Mexico, takes a second turn at fiction in this sequel to *The Sharpest Sight*, a tense blend of fantasy and mystery centering on American Indian lore. Relying on his own Choctaw heritage, the author tells the story of Cole McCurtain, whose life is coming apart at the seams. Cole no longer enjoys teaching American Indian Studies at UC-Santa Cruz. He drinks a lot, eats little and sorely misses his daughter, who's living with his divorced wife (to whom he owes substantial alimony). To top it off, he can't sleep because his dreams are haunted by images of a mysterious, malevolent Indian gambler. Matters turn dramatically worse when someone starts murdering female students. Are the killings somehow related to Cole's nightmares? To his dismay, it appears that it is his destiny to face the gambler and to solve the slayings. At first he is aided by his only friend at Santa Cruz, a transvestite Navajo. But soon Cole's daughter arrives, then his Choctaw family, and together they confront a centuries-old evil force that was unleashed by Spanish missionaries' cruel treatment of Native Americans. Owens expertly mixes genres and blends in generous amounts of Native American history. To his credit, he also leavens his grim but gripping tale with substantial humor. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
From Library Journal  
Cole McCurtain, of Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish descent, is a professor of English at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Lately he's been dreaming of events that happened when the Spanish settled in Santa Cruz way back when. In the dreams, he plays the part of both the sadistic Spanish priest and his tortured Indian victim. At the same time, coeds are disappearing from campus, their headless bodies washing up on the shore. Other bodies are also found, un mutilated and dead of a single gun shot. Cole is finding bear tracks in his yard. Could all these events be related? Cole's father, Uncle Luther, and friend Onatima, whom readers may remember from *The Sharpest Sight* (LJ 1/92), come to help Cole sort it all out. Novelist/critic Owens (*Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, LJ 11/15/92) provides a great cast of characters and a fascinating plot that make this a recommended book for general readers.  
Debbie Bogenschutz, Cincinnati Technical Coll. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
From Booklist  
Santa Cruz, California, is a troubled town, and "Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish-Cajun" Indian Studies professor Cole McCurtain--protagonist of Owens' first mystery novel, *The Sharpest Sight* (1992)--sits at the center of several such troubles and generations of woe. How are Cole's terrifying dreams of a Spanish priest murdered in 1812 by local Indians he abused and a naked gambler painted half black, half white tied to the dismembered bodies washing ashore on Pacific beaches? Can Cole trust his students, his intense teaching assistant, or trickster Alex Yazzie, a Navajo colleague who wears an Evan Picone skirt while dressing a deer on the lawn of the university's faculty housing? Happily, Cole's support system soon arrives: his college-age daughter Abby, from New Mexico (the home he deserted when his marriage fell apart); then his father, great-uncle, and a medicine woman, Onatima, from back-east Choctaw country. In *Bone Game*, Louis Owens, English professor at the University of New Mexico and author of *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992), offers his readers another moody, atmospheric tale at the intersection of past and present Anglo and Native American cultures. Mary Carroll