

Far Stones: A Novel

Loren Woodson

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Far Stones offers a fascinating glimpse into an underexplored aspect of the history of the American West.

A saga rendered in authentic detail, Loren Woodson's *Far Stones* is an appealing classic adventure story made exceptional by the way it highlights African American experiences on the western frontier.

Life isn't easy for Tom and Stefan, African American preteen twins, during the Civil War and immediately following. The boys are caught up in the violence—Tom is captured in a Comanche raid, and Stefan is left to struggle for survival on the Texas frontier.

While he is separated from Tom, Stefan's life moves among those of more than one real-life western character, including troopers from the African American buffalo soldier regiments and a mysterious New Orleans native named Raoul, whom he meets in Texas.

Tom, meanwhile, is captured and enslaved; later he is adopted and immersed in the life of a Comanche warrior in a tribe led by Blue Turtle. He's first known as Cloud Quawker, and later as Far Stones, a name related to his ability to throw rocks at enough speed and distance that they become deadly missiles.

Notable for its depth of research, the story nods to the African Americans who were part of the western settlement. The narrative briefly explores the life of the "People," or Nermernuh, as the Comanche call themselves. They wanted only to roam the great llano stretching from San Antonio out onto high plains of New Mexico and into the great canyon of Palo Duro. The novel deftly illustrates how their way of life collapsed under the pressure of white encroachment.

The setting, with the vastness of the southern plains and its bounty of buffalo, is smartly observed and rendered picturesquely. The dialogue fits the era and is easily parsed. The plot is logical and the story flows smoothly.

The twins' narrative is easy to follow—a chapter from Tom's point of view alternates with another from Stefan's perspective. Following twin protagonists living separate lives can be difficult, but there is sufficient backstory on Tom and Stefan's early life to make the parallel narratives work.

While the brothers do often think of one another, there is sometimes a lack of intimacy and passion as the story progresses. There are references to their love for the then-new sport of baseball from each boy—meant to emphasize the bond between the two—but that thread seems superfluous.

Readable and well researched, *Far Stones* offers a fascinating glimpse into an underexplored aspect of the history of the American West.

GARY PRESLEY (July 11, 2017)

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