

The Quest: A Lakota Legend

Charles Richard Latona

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The Quest is an epic historical novel that centers on Lakota spirituality.

In Charles Richard Latona's absorbing novel *The Quest*, a Lakota holy man takes on a new student and cares for the physical and spiritual health of his people.

White Wolf is both a shaman and his tribe's respected holy man, responsible for collecting and preparing healing herbs, conducting rites and rituals, and overseeing the young men's transitions into manhood. White Wolf guides them through rites like the Sun Dance and their first buffalo hunts, which are portrayed with realism and respect. He teaches them their history and the ways of warriors, but also has to choose one young man to train as his replacement.

White Wolf and his student, Flaming Sky, are the focus. Their perspectives as warriors and holy men are reverent toward nature, and they express an inherent connection to the earth. Their thoughts and behaviors are directed by symbolism: the blends of herbs in their ceremonial pipes are specific to their needs and are exhaled with prayers for guidance, for example, while the killing and preparation of animals is seen as a type of physical and spiritual medicine. The men also face conflicts in the form of wild animals and rival tribes. White Wolf proves cunning when it comes to strategy, as is Flaming Sky when he takes on the legendary white buffalo.

Everyday aspects of Lakota life are described. Within the tribe, family dynamics and social expectations emerge, especially around the young men's initiations. One young man suffers abuse at the hands of his father for not living up to his father's standards, resulting in disasters that impact the entire group.

The different roles of men and women are also a factor. Though the men have more authority and power, women are treated with honor and assume places of importance. Diverse groups play in: the characters find friends and foes in the Cheyenne, Pawnee, and the villainous "desert devils" whose unpredictable and cruel practices are rendered in gruesome and illustrative terms.

The majesty and influence of nature is central to the story, brought to life with imagery depicting strong trees, medicinal flowers, venerated animals, and the star-filled night sky. Each season impacts the Lakota, who change camps in the summer and winter. They are interdependent with the environment, which takes on psychological significance as it relates their practical and sacred needs.

A relationship-defining ending hints to the future of the tribe. However, missing quotation marks and extra periods mar the text, and some of the initially important characters fade from importance as the book progresses; others meet too hasty endings.

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DELIA STANLEY (December 3, 2019)

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