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Kings Of Broken Things



Synopsis

With characters depicted in precise detail and wide panorama— a kept-woman’s parlor, a contentious interracial baseball game on the Fourth of July, and the tragic true events of the Omaha Race Riot of 1919—Kings of Broken Things reveals the folly of human nature in an era of astonishing ambition. During the waning days of World War I, three lost souls find themselves adrift in Omaha, Nebraska, at a time of unprecedented nationalism, xenophobia, and political corruption. Adolescent European refugee Karel Miihlstein’s life is transformed after neighborhood boys discover his prodigious natural talent for baseball. Jake Strauss, a young man with a violent past and desperate for a second chance, is drawn into a criminal underworld. Evie Chambers, a kept woman, is trying to make ends meet and looking every which way to escape her cheerless existence. As wounded soldiers return from the front and black migrant workers move north in search of economic opportunity, the immigrant wards of Omaha become a tinderbox of racial resentment stoked by unscrupulous politicians. Punctuated by an unspeakable act of mob violence, the fates of Karel, Jake, and Evie will become inexorably entangled with the schemes of a ruthless political boss whose will to power knows no bounds. Written in the tradition of Don DeLillo and Colum McCann, with a great debt to Ralph Ellison, Theodore Wheeler’s debut novel Kings of Broken Things is a panoramic view of a city on the brink of implosion during the course of this summer of strife.

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Customer Reviews

I admit at first I wasn't sure what to think about this novel, wasn't sure if I would like it and whether or not I would finish it. I'm SO GLAD I didn't give up on it because it gets better and better with each new vignette, and held me fast right up through the epilogue. For my family, friends and others who have lived in Omaha for any length of time - or still do, I highly recommend this story of historical fiction. It doesn't paint a pretty picture of the city during this period of time, but many of us are aware that Omaha was at one time a city that had its dark side, and some of that is revealed in this novel. And for those of us who have lived there, it is fascinating to recognise names of streets, buildings and places that are familiar today that existed in the time setting of this story. Bottom line: I highly recommend this book.

What an unexpectedly interesting book. This isn't what I usually choose to read but I wanted to try something different this month. This was a great choice for my Kindle First Pick for July. Although the book is a work of fiction, in the Author's Note Wheeler writes ".... the scenes depicted are a fictional approximation of what life was like in Omaha during the last years of World War 1 and how the Omaha Race Riot of 1919 was experienced." I must confess I didn't even know that Omaha had race riots. This is an amazing accomplishment for the first time novelist, Theodore Wheeler. I was transported to a time and place that was unknown to me. The characters are extremely well written. There wasn't a false word that made me think this isn't real. This is a time of immigration, political corruption, open prostitution and the doughboys coming home from the war to find their jobs are no longer available. Many of them are amputees and many more suffering from PTSD, better known then as "shell shock" and are unable to work. The Spanish Influenza was spreading eventually killing fifty million people. One comment regarding the sickness: "A plague like this never would have spread around the globe if it weren't for the war." This was not a quick easy read. I took my time with it because it gave me a lot to think about. This is a sweeping epic of a book, well written with lots of background regarding the time and place. If you're willing to take the time to read it, this is a great book. This is my idea of a serious book that deserves five stars.

This is a well-written fictionalized account of a true story. It looks at a horrific event in Omaha history from points of view of different characters. It really helps you see the story from different sides. I was a little disappointed that the primary victim was not fleshed out at all. He was a victim because people didn't consider him to be human. After reading the book, I still don't have a good sense of his humanity. I suspect that contemplating the events from the victim's point of view proved too painful for the author and he just couldn't put himself inside his shoes.

I gave this book 4 stars because of the ending ,which wasn't quite enough to satisfy the reader. Very interesting story and compelling. I really enjoyed reading it,even though it certainly did not paint the best picture of our ancestors. However it did show the resilience and fortitude that built this country . One hundred years later we american New and old still struggle with same issues. Really good first book, looking forward to reading more from this author.

I was interested in this novel because it was set during the time that my father was born; I was hoping to get a feel for the way the world was. The writing was excellent, portraying clear and vivid images of Omaha and sympathetically drawing credible and fully developed characters. As a reader, I came away feeling that I knew and understood those characters - whether I especially liked them or not.

I think I would enjoy this book more if I read it a second time. I thought it was difficult to understand the connections between the various characters and also hard to follow the thread of the story. Also, the writing style seemed choppy to me. However, when I finally finished the book I understood that the first part of the book was attempting to prepare the reader for the race riot. That riot came very close to the end of the book. Because that was a true event in Omaha's history, and I had never read about it before, I am glad I read the book.

It was a reasonable book and held my interest - I did finish reading it. There was a lot of build up to the "point" of the book -- racial tension back in the 1920's -- climaxing in an "incident". Somehow I thought that the book was over pretty quickly after. I would like to have had as much "aftermath" as there was "build up." But it was interesting.

People of Omaha, Nebraska and neighboring midwest will like it. The description of the riot at the

end is quite gripping. Authot paints an informative picture of the immigrants, however the characters are not well built. Readers may find it difficult to empathize with them. Overall, nice book of historic value.

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