



## Dream Wheels

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## **Dream Wheels** Richard Wagamese

Rodeo cowboy Joe Willie Wolfchild, riding an explosive bull called See Four and moments away from becoming World Champion, suffers a devastating accident. His parents and grandparents use all their native wisdom to ease him out of his subsequent bitter depression, but without success. Meanwhile, in a distant city, a troubled young kid named Aiden plans a holdup that goes wrong and lands himself in jail. When he emerges, a sympathetic police officer arranges a job at a ranch, where his mother Claire will accompany him in an attempt to restore their relationship. It is the Wolfchild ranch.

Supported by the ferocious strength and native spirituality of the Wolfchild women, Joe Willie and Aiden fight through painful transformations, and their physical and mental rehabilitations are mirrored in the age-worn chrome of an ancient pickup truck they restore together. As the two men first clash and then come together in a friendship that helps each overcome the challenge of reentering a world that's forever changed, Claire's eyes are opened to a life she has never hoped for and opens her heart to a love she still can't convince herself she deserves. Written with lyric intensity and a great respect for native teachings, *Dream Wheels* announces the presence of a major new literary talent, sure to take his rightful place alongside writers like Cormac McCarthy and Jim Harrison as a gifted chronicler of the modern West.

## **Dream Wheels Details**

Date : Published August 22nd 2006 by St. Martin's Press (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9780312359263

Author : Richard Wagamese

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## From Reader Review Dream Wheels for online ebook

### **Heather(Gibby) says**

I have read several of Richard Wagamese's books and this one ranks right up there with his later novels. He has a real gift of getting to the heart of our humanity and what makes us tick.

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### **Barbara Morris says**

I loved this book. I would never have imagined that I'd want to read a book about jail and abuse and bull-riding. But I was immediately drawn in, and kept in, and now I want to read more by Wagamese, no matter what the subject.

It's rare for me to enjoy books that have long expository paragraphs, normally preferring books with mostly dialogue, but Wagamese has such a wonderful lyrical quality to his writing that I read them as carefully as I read the dialogue. Interestingly, many of the settings and situations of the book don't seem to lend themselves at all to lyrical writing, but Wagamese was able to make me want to continue reading even the most horrifying scenes.

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### **Sarah says**

When I heard of Richard's passing last month, I surprised myself at how hard it hit me. I'd been lucky enough to meet him a couple times, most recently last summer, and he is without a doubt one of my favourite authors. The loss of him in the world is so sad but his spirit and his books are immortal. On that day, Mar 11th, I knew exactly where on my bookshelves his books were and I picked Dream Wheels as the one book of his that I own but hadn't read yet. I read it slowly, savouring the words. It's one of his earlier novels and has themes and scenes that show up again in his later writing, like the medicine walk and of family stories told around a fire being like embers that burn through generations. Dream Wheels is the story of Joe Willie, a rodeo star who suffers a career ending injury, and of Aiden, coming out of 2 yrs at juvie and needing a fresh start. At a ranch in the Chilcotin region of British Columbia (where Wagamese lived), these two young men heal. "To his eyes, used to the dullness of concrete and steel, it was a feast, and Aiden sat straighter, watching it unroll before them. He could feel the openness work against his insides. As his eyes reached farther down the length of the valley, he felt smaller and larger at the same time. He felt less like he was moving through it as he was moving with it, becoming part of the sage and pasture and draw and the severe slope of the valley, and the feeling crested and broke against his ribs and he exhaled long and slow". Beautiful writing. A natural storyteller.

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### **Meredith says**

This is more a 3.5 rating. As always Wagamese's prose leave you breathless. The depth of his characters is

always amazing. I just found the story a bit too slow and a bit repetitive. Perhaps I wouldn't have found it as slow if it hadn't been about rodeo, which I really don't care to know a lot about. I just don't get it. Not my favourite book of his but it is still worth the read for its in depth look of human nature and our souls.

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### **Carol Stephen says**

I first came across this book as book fair coordinator at a Canadian Authors Association conference in Ottawa, where it had received the CAA Fiction award. Just reading the blurb on the back cover, the first two lines, was enough to make me want to read the rest of the book.

"The great bull was true to his name. He detonated."

I found the writing compelling, the characters well-drawn, and in places rather poetic in its phrasing. I enjoyed the descriptions of life on the rodeo circuit, the conflicts of the main characters, and the "Dream Wheel" idea is fascinating as well.

Five star read for me. And I never read "western novels".

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### **John says**

This was a very sensory book, lots of sights sounds and smells. It is a very spiritual to. A lot of First Nation philosophy in this story of a son and mother finding a new path in life thanks to life on a ranch.

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### **Jeri Strickland says**

Richard Wagamese is wonderful descriptive writer.

I read a description of Richard Wagamese's writing as "lyrical". I agree. Richard Wagamese is a Canadian First Nations Writer and periodically writes columns for the Calgary Herald newspaper.

It took a bit to get into the book, but I was definitely rewarded. Great book.

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### **Nancy says**

a little overwrought but a great vision and amazing descriptions of rodeo and the power of landscape. characters a bit too caricature... they sometimes seem more symbolic than real. very poetic and a little spiritual. in a good way.

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**Elizabeth says**

I love it when a book pulls me in right from the quote in the preface. Of course, lots of seemingly promising books fall flat, once the actual author of the book steps in. So I usually make sure to read the first page before deciding whether to keep reading.

It's so satisfying when a book follows the first-sentence-of-a-novel-must-be-compelling rule. It's the rule that makes me need to continue reading, wondering what will unfold next. (Did you go to the same school that I did? Did you sit in the darkened room to watch a grainy movie of Maynard Mack in the front of a classroom, balanced precariously on the edge of his desk, enthusiastically crying out "Call Me Ishmael!" and "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times" followed by timpani "bong bong bong Bong Bong Bong" and opening credits to his instructional film about the novel?)

Of course, sometimes it's only the first paragraph that holds the thrill and the story falters and flags. But there is no fear of that happening with Wagamese's story telling in *Dream Wheels*. I was snagged by the time I finished the first paragraph. And (if you'll forgive the blatant metaphor) thoroughly roped in by the time I read the second paragraph.

Which might seem odd. The book is about rodeo riders.

Of course there's quite a bit more to it than that. It's really about living. But who cares about the subject really? It's a good story. I do love a good story. And that's what Dream Wheels is. No, wait. It's not a good story; it's a great story.

Don't take my word for it. Read it for yourself.

-Al Purdy, *Borderlands*

## -=\* Prologue \*=-

The Old ones say that fate has a smell, a feel, a presence, a tactile heft in the air. Animals know it. It's what brings hunter and prey together. They recognize the ancient call and there's a quickening in the blood that drives the senses into edginess, readiness: the wild spawned in the scent. It's why a wolf pack will halt their dash across a white tumble of snow to look at a man. Stand there in the sudden timeless quiet and gaze at him, solemn amber eyes dilating, the threat leaned forward before whirling as one dark body to disappear into the trees. They do that to

return him to the wild, to make all things even once again: to restore proper knowledge. The Old Ones say animals bless a man with those moments by returning him to the senses he surrendered when he claimed language, knowledge and invention as power.

The great bull sensed it and it shivered.

[...]

He heaved a deep, rib-expanding breath and let it go slowly. Beneath him the bull shuddered once then settled into a curious quiet. They sat there connected by the bull rope and one gloved hand, waiting. There was a smell in the air. Joe Willie shook his head once quickly to clear it, shivered his legs against the bull's sides, raised his right arm slowly to clear the top rail of the chute and nodded solemnly to the rope man at the front of the chute.

And the world exploded. (p.1, 7)

Other favourite passages (As previously, I've put them into spoiler tags for people like me who prefer to see a book unfold from beginning to end in the way that the author has intended.)

(view spoiler)

The crack made him forget. For the time it lasted he could slip a shroud over his anger and let the drug take him higher, upward beyond the things that roiled within him on the ground. They'd walk then. They'd walk though the neighbourhoods and not worry about the gangs and the threat of violence that came from being a pair of unaffiliated kids. The crack let them forget. The gun, or at least the knowledge of having the gun, let them disregard it. The crack let them laugh. They'd laugh in the face of everything and as they walked they felt as though they radiated, the energy of the high pushing everything back a yard or so, making it visible, clearer, as if they were seeing it for the first time. [...] As the night fell downward, deeper, they made their way through the streets of their own neighbourhood preparing themselves to walk into the vacuums that were their homes. It was then that the crack lost its effect. It was then that Aiden knew that drugs weren't the answer for him. Being high meant you had to come down, and if all you had to come down to was the same place you left, there didn't seem to be a lot of point to it. Instead, he became more determined to see his own course through. He'd change the landscape. (p. 57)

The sun climbed higher on the wall and he watched it, remembering how he'd loved the light of morning on the ranch. It never failed to give him a sense of melancholy so deep in the bones that he could swear purple was a feeling. He'd loved sitting on the porch in the early morning, enjoying a coffee and watching the tricks of the light as it broke over everything. It was an old

light, ancient and powerful, rich with stories, and sometimes he believed it spoke to him. There was a voice in the cackle of the ravens, the wacky wobbled call of the loons, the hushed whisper of the breeze and the soft moan of cattle. [...] [I]t reminded him of something gone but not forgotten, something in the background of everything he knew, something relevant to everything but remaining unseen, unheard except for fleeting moments in mornings when the quiet peeled back slowly to allow it a vague undertone, a beckoning [...] [H]e'd always loved the cool edge of the air and the look of the sky in the early mornings.

This morning was different.

It was the crutches. (p.87)

He'd been a detective on the youth squad for a few years now and he'd about seen everything. The thing was, kids these days never learned how to concentrate, how to focus their attention on one thing for more than a couple of minutes. Their music came at them in three-minute bursts. The movies they loved never stretched a scene beyond the same three-minute time frame. Hell, getting a kid to sit and read for an hour would take a court order most times, and except for computer time, the chat lines, action games, endless surfing and noodling about they did, they couldn't commit any time to anything. It wasn't their fault. No one took the time to show them the wonder of things anymore. Like music. Golec's kids went to the symphony with him and the missus every week. Their attention spans were incredible for their age, They could sit and listen to an entire symphony, and it showed in their appreciation of music in general. Sure, they still listened to the crap that was everywhere, but mixed in with the rap and hip-hop CDs were healthy dollops of Brahms, Dorak and Elgar. They got scope that way, a way to measure, a means to compare evaluate and choose. It seems to Golec that most parents neglected their kids' attention spans far too frequently and the result was a reduced ability to choose. (p.100, 101)

[S]he stood in the middle of the room and wondered why they called it a living room. When you were alone there wasn't a great deal of living going on. She glanced around at the accumulation of stuff, the small gathering of things that sat on the shelves, hung on the wall and graced the windows. None of it worked. None of it performed a function beyond the filling of space. None of it held any special properties, any attractant energy that could pull life together. None of it mattered in the end. What mattered was the energy of people. People made a living room live. History didn't lie within the things you kept. History lay within the people who filled the rooms. History was what her family needed now and she reached down and grabbed her bags and stepped toward the beginning of her history with her son. (p.188)

The land was rich in dozens of shades of green. The mountains hard against the clear blue sky scalloped the length of the valley, and the variant colours of the rock, the long, V-shaped funnelling of slides, the poked peninsulas of trees and the undulating suggestion of lesser, rounded humps of peaks before them gave it a wild kinetic energy, an intensity humming in the

stillness as though all of it, the mountains, the valley, the sky, was vibrating with the effort of holding itself in. To his eyes, used to the dullness of concrete and steel, it was a feast, and Aiden sat straighter, watching it unroll before them. He could feel the openness work against his insides. As his eyes reached farther down the length of the valley he felt smaller and larger at the same time. As the car ate up the distance, he felt less like he was moving through it as he was moving with it, becoming a part of the sage and pasture and draw and the severe slope of the valley, and the feeling crested and broke against his ribs and he exhaled long and slow.

(p.190, 191)

[W]ith the sun shining out of a hard electric-blue sky the land was invigorating. She pulled over to the shoulder and stepped out and allowed it to envelope her. It felt like it had hands. The breeze that blew across it brought the scent of juniper, pine and sage and animal smells that only served to heighten the sense of open space, so that standing there Claire felt the soul and the spirit of it all and she almost cried. [...] There was a song in it. She was sure of that. It was an ancient refrain that resided within everything, and she closed her eyes and let the breeze play across her face and tried to catch it, snare it with all her senses, reaching out even with her skin, so that when she hummed, a low throaty note that was more moan than melody, it felt right and good and old as the land itself. She let it rise out of her. She stretched out her hands wide at her sides with her eyes closed and her head tilted back and let the note escape her, ragged and bruised and raw, and as it slid into the air she felt the land refill her, nestle into the spot where the note had lived and slake a thirst she never knew she carried. (p.194, 195)

[W]hat they gave them was choice. In the end, it's all we ever have. We can have all the head knowing in the world, be all proper educated and smart, but life is about choices [...] That choice is our superhuman power. It allows us to change everything all at once. [...] We choose what to believe, how to behave, how to think. We choose how we live our lives. Us. No one else. Our choice. You look at things the way they are, and if you don't like it you choose to change it. (p.232)

When you're busy with your own thoughts or moving toward something you need tending to, they look at you. And it's like there's a story in their eyes, you know? The story of you. Like they can see all of you in that moment. Where you've been, what you've done, all your dreams, your wishes, everything. That look is so strong it's like they push you with their eyes, push you toward whatever it is you want, push you toward whatever you might choose, or toward what they might choose for you, wish for you, dream for you. I've never been on the receiving end of a look like that. I can only hope that it's in mine when I look at my boy. (p.301)

The coyotes began a chorus, and they looked up to see the moon hovering over the mountains to the east, full and fat and silver, pockmarked with ancient collisions, the spray of them like

wrinkles on an old man's face. The wild was in the air. A horse nickered in the corral and they could hear the basso thud of bulls stamping restless hooves in their pens. There was a breeze suddenly and the flames flickered higher so that when they looked across at each other it was like their faces were in motion, flowing between age and youth, mask and reality upward into the breeze and across the draw to join the coyote chorus sailing to the moon. (p.301)

The kid had no head for tradition. Everything was all guts and glory to him. All he wanted was the thrill. For Joe Willie the thrill, the eight seconds of glory that you earned the right to, was only the culmination of the life you lived leading up to it every time. He rode as an expression of himself, a real working cowboy, and the kid, to his way of seeing, had nothing to express beyond attitude and recklessness. Well, he'd seen many broken, busted men who'd tried to forge a career on unruly posturing, and it wasn't a pretty sight. (p.312)

Things carry stories, Claire. It's why we keep things. Because the histories the bear make them precious. [...] We forget how vital those histories are to us and we get lost in the price of things instead, their worldly value, their cost. that's what we consider if we lose it. (p.330)

(hide spoiler)]

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## Mark says

Dream Wheels, by Richard Wagamese, 2006. This book starts with a bang – a ten-page description of a bull ride at a rodeo. Fast, furious prose – good writing. There are snatches of that throughout Wagamese's novel, especially around rodeo and ranching, and the people who populate them. The weaving of western ranch culture with Indian (Ojibwe and Sioux) culture and teachings is interesting as well. And this is another book in which the Irish (one of the main characters is of Ojibwe, Sioux, and Irish background) are referred to as a tribal people, an indigenous culture.

Here's a good piece: "Most of all, she supposed, she'd learned that there is a backbone in life, a spiritual spine that undercut everything, and that finding it in yourself, learning to feel its pulse, was salvation in its purest sense."

But there are parts that seemed forced, in which Wagamese writes about things he doesn't know so well. And he comes back to them, repeatedly, with the overall impact that I felt a better editor would have made

this a shorter novel, more compact, with just a much bang as it started with.

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### **Tina says**

This book was beautiful, yet very repetitive. Wagamese has a way with words and beautiful prose but if you read it once, you've read it twenty times.

I found that I learned a lot about rodeo and Wagamese describes the courage and determination it takes to overcome fear and heartache very well. I am however very far removed from the world of rodeo and I still don't see the thrill in it. However I appreciate the lifestyle after reading this book. Even if it's only slightly.

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### **Linda Lpp says**

I smiled when I read your review Sarah. I've had Dream Wheels on my book shelf for ages, and at one time even had it in a container to donate/unread, in an attempt to make room for all the other books stuffing my shelves with more recent additions (I think all book lovers get the picture).

I skimmed through a few reviews and decided to hold it back, to place it on the top of the pile!

I'm so glad I did!

In the first few pages it was a whole new world for me. Cowboys, rodeos, Native Indians and all the associated experiences I knew nothing about. But all senses of tragedy, loss, abuse, and hopelessness soon turned around.

A third of the way into the "wild ride" of stories, the focus has switched to challenge the afflicted to become survivors. Wow.

Am loving this book!!

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### **Gregory says**

A good story is a good story no matter what the genre and indeed this is a good story. In the first and last chapters my heart was pounding and had to remind myself to breathe. There were a lot of good chapters in between too. I would have given this book four stars but there were times when Joe Willie, the busted up rodeo champion didn't ring true. The Mothers and Grandmothers also got just a tad preachy on occasion. But overall this was a fine book. I liked it.

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### **Dlmrose says**

4+

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## **Kay McCracken says**

Richard's novel takes the reader into many unforgettable places: into the mind of a bull (extraordinay!), into the pain of a champion bull rider who has been badly damaged -- both physically and emotionally -- into the inner life of a single parent who finally gathers the courage to escape her abusive husband, into the psyche of her teenage son who is in danger of locking his emotions away forever, and into the warmth and wisdom of the Native family who open their ranch and their hearts to these damaged people. You will never look at rodeo or bull riders the same way again!

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## **Stephen Ring says**

Richard Wagamese understood the power of words. He made a living from writing – eventually, after terrible struggles – but he also knew what words, put together the right way, could do for a life: They could save it. He knew this as a writer, and also as a reader. Whether his words were on the page or spoken aloud in mesmerising performances, they were alive with raw honesty, searing insight and a delicate eloquence. - Taken from Globe and Mail obituary for Richard Wagamese by Marsha Lederman.

I started reading Dream Wheels shortly after learning of Richard Wagamese's death this year. My introduction to this author was Indian Horse. Dream Wheels was a powerful different read on issues of First Nations treatment, their culture and application of spiritual and physical lifestyle to an unusual arena...the rodeo arena. Ideal for adults and young adult. The conflicts on Aidan and of Joe Willie reflect life struggles of many of us. Good testimony to the power of faith and family, and the importance of community.

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## **Mortira says**

Dream Wheels is a beautiful novel, and a delicious piece of literature. I think the most telling compliment that I can give is that there isn't a single description of food or clothing in the entire book. The existence of a hat or cup of coffee might be noted, but there is just too much story to leave room for anything else.

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## **Kathleen Nightingale says**

Oh how I loved this book! Oh how I hated this book!

Using the analogy of sitting on the back porch downing a bottle of beer after mowing the lawn I wanted this to be a quick read and started reading the book at my typical fast pace. After fifty pages wondering what I had read and how it connected I started over again. This was a necessity because the second time I started reading I took the attitude of sitting down after dinner in front of the fire drinking a glass of port. (All that was missing was the cigar- but seeing as how I'm female this is forgivable). When I slowed down and absorbed and reflected back on what I had read and was reading I was taken on a wonderful slow story which refused to be hastened. One of the reasons I love Richard Wagamese's writing. Don't give up try try again and you will be richly rewarded with a wonderful story that you certainly will not soon forget.

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### **Linda Robinson says**

Wagamese's skill, clear understanding and heart glow in the storytelling of Joe Willie Wolfchild and Aiden, two men galaxies apart in experience, yet twin stars in an embattled dust-choked rodeo arena that can mean glory or death. There is a rightness to the ancient dance of humans and nature as Wagamese writes, respect for skills, and most welcome, an abiding belief in the power and dignity of females. For that alone, I can praise Wagamese mightily. The prose is heart clenching. I have the sounds and silent fury of the bull pen before a ride that will define everyone in the stall: See Four, rolling eyes upward to view the beast on his back. A father with a hand on his son's chest as the seconds to launch tick by. A mother bear, grieved and starving who stands to sniff the scent of food, and the miasma of power calling to power. The dust of the arena and the dust of the barn where the ranch hands yank on ropes to make the mechanical bull spin and buck: like life, unforgiving, unpredictable, unavoidable. The menfolk - Lionel who believes trucks carry the story of their lives, to Aiden who must unclench his heart while he clenches his teeth and Birch and Joe Willie in between, the dreams and hopes of a father for a son. Each character is richly painted on the dance card of the still living. In the background, there is Iron Mountain and the treacherous, winding uphill climb. Waiting in the garage, a battered, cigarette-scarred, block broken truck with faded paint, the ghosts of country songs, the bench seat molded by those who came before. A dreamscape, unforgettable.

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### **Sharon says**

Every single time I read a book by Richard Wagamese I savor both the story he spins and the craftsmanship of the telling. He is a gifted writer!

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