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3 captures

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This novel, based in the historical facts of the fabled West, tells a tale of adventure of a young man from rural Virginia, assigned to be the Government Indian Agent on the Bosque Redondo Reservation in the desolate New Mexico desert after the Civil War.

In the 1860s, the Navajo Indians were held as virtual prisoners of war in an "experiment in Indian management" under the command of an unscrupulous Civil War general who was later removed because he had been swindling money sent by Washington for the Indians' food and lodging, making himself and his cronies rich at the Indians' expense and suffering.

This story recounts how the fictional Indian Agent develops a romantic relationship with a Two-Spirit medicine person among the Navajos, and so comes to appreciate personally the plight of the Indians on the reservation. The Two-Spirit Person is modeled on the revered character in certain Native American cultures who blends masculine and feminine genders into a kind of loving exemplar of the culture's spiritual values.

Through a series of adventures, shot through with Navajo mysticism, the two lovers expose the general's chicanery and bring about the Indians' return to their ancestral homeland in eastern Arizona. In the process, the young Virginian learns Native American spirituality and discovers a positive context for his own emotional and sexual development.

His marriage to his Two-Spirit partner demonstrates historical precedent for same-sex marriage on American soil. "Gay marriage" is not new to America. The indigenous cultures on this continent had honored same-sex relationships long before Europeans immigrated here.

***TWO SPIRITS: A Story of Life with the Navajo* was awarded a prize for historical fiction by the Arch and Bruce Brown Foundation.**

The book includes an Afterword: About the Historical Accuracy of this Novel and A Commentary by Navajo/Dine' scholar Dr. Wesley Thomas.

"Two-Spirit" is the term chosen by lesbian and gay Native Americans (at an international conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1990) for gender variant people in indigenous cultures. These two-spirits were called "berdache" by French explorers (a term that is sometimes considered derogatory today). In the Native cultures they were known by a variety of names, including (in English translation, of course) "Changing Ones," "One who is Transformed," "Those with Special Powers," "Spiritual Mediator," "Healer," also "Crossdresser" and "Male Woman," "Female Man."

In their native tongues, the Diné (Navajo) refer to them as *nadleehé*, the Lakota (Sioux) as *winkte*, the Mohave as *alyha*, the Zuni as *lhamana*, the Omaha as *mexoga*, the Aleut and Kodiak as *achnucak*, the Zapotec as *ira' muxe*, the Cheyenne as *he man eh*. The Two-Spirit term itself comes from an Anishinabe/Ojibway term, *nizh manitoag*.

PRAISE FOR TWO SPIRITS

This novel is more than just an exciting story of Native Americans in the Civil War era.

Drawing upon Diné philosophy, it presents a positive way to approach life. It calls for acknowledging and respecting the important role that eroticism plays in a person's existence. It provides a sense of humanity in its recognition that people, who would today be identified as transgendered or gay, were always part of the Diné way of life. Above all, this book--I hope--will provide the means for Americans to look at, if not re-look at, the Native population which has been pushed into the cracks between the pages of American history textbooks.

--Wesley K. Thomas, Ph.D. (Dine'), Assistant Professor, Anthropology and Gender Studies, Indiana University

With its sweet and triumphal love story, *Two Spirits* is a welcome addition to the literature of the real West and the hidden history of same-sex people. It gives a whole new meaning to "how the west was won."

--Bo Young, Editor, White Crane Journal

***Two Spirits* is a story of compassion, and of love between males--one of them a person of "two-spirits," a berdache. It is a tale of spirituality, injustice, and courage set against the stark tragedy of the Navajo experience of the 1860's.**

--Ruth Sims, author, *The Phoenix*

***Two Spirits* is a spectacular tale based on the 1860s eviction of the Navajo people from their sacred homelands. The reader is transported to an earlier era where little-known spiritual**

traditions were, until recently, unmentionable outside some Native American cultures.

With an obvious love and deep respect for the Navajo, Williams and Johnson expose a clash of cultures that will stun many. *Two Spirits*, a treasure to read, is a rare combination of historical fiction and spiritual wisdom at its absolute finest.

--W. Randy Haynes (Cherokee), author, *Cajun Snuff*

Wade McCollum wrote: "Can I tell you how many times I cried reading TWO SPIRITS? SO beautiful... like coming home."

New York writer John Caminiti wrote: "I just finished reading "Two Spirits" and I wanted to say that I found it to be one of the most moving novels I have read in a very long time. . . It is still resonating with me. I can't get some of it out of my mind. I had a very similar feeling when I read *Song of the Loon*. Both books spoke to me in very deep emotional ways.

Published Reviews: TWO SPIRITS

by "Betty Conley" ElizConley@aol.com elizconley
Mon Aug 21, 2006

Two Spirits: A Story of Life With the Navajo
By Walter L. Williams and Toby Johnson
Lethe Press 2006 \$18.00

Set in the New Mexican Territory in the Civil War era, TWO SPIRITS focuses on a little known and shameful fact of American history. Thousands of Navajo Indians, who refer to themselves as Diné, were held in US Government sanctioned concentration camp-like captivity, at Fort Sumner, from 1864 to 1868. Walter L. Williams, Ph.D. and Toby Johnson, Ph.D. combined their knowledge and talent to pen a historically accurate fictional account of the Diné's incarceration.

TWO SPIRITS' factual story line centers around the callous treatment the Diné suffered under the supervision of the righteous Union General James Carlton. Carlton, an Indian fighter, devised a plan to relocate almost twelve thousand "savages" from their fertile homeland at Canyon de Chelly (now northeast Arizona), to the Bosque Redondo outside Fort Sumner. The Diné were forced to walk a distance of 325 miles, in winter, with insufficient wagons to carry the young, old, and infirm. More than three thousand people died en route to the desert area. Carlton's Indian "experiment" had the support of

officials in Washington who wished the Indians pacified. The officials saw to it that sufficient funds for food and housing for the Diné were regularly sent to Fort Sumner. The funds, unfortunately, made General James Carlton a wealthy man. During the Diné's four years of captivity without government subsidies, and unable to grow crops in the arid soil, another quarter of their population died. The vulnerable Diné were also victims of raids by the New Mexicans. General Carlton never ordered the soldiers to defend his charges against these attacks.

Adding appeal and fast pace to TWO SPIRITS' plot, Williams and Johnson developed a beautiful love story between a young Virginian, William Lee, and a high ranked Diné, Hasbaá. Will had been shunned by his fundamentalist preacher father after being found in a barn with another young man. With the advice and help of an influential townsman, Will went to Washington, D.C. and was fortunate to be hired as an apprentice Indian Agent. Assigned to Fort Sumner, Will realized immediately that the Indians were poorly treated, then learned the previous agent was dead. Feeling fully responsible for the Indian's welfare, Will conscientiously wrote reports to his superiors in Washington requesting additional aid for the starving Diné. Will was not yet aware of Carlton's duplicity.

Will frequently visited the Diné camp and after proving himself worthy was accepted into their talk circle. He became captivated with the spiritual person, Hasbaá. A two spirit person, Hasbaá was honored and respected by the people. According to Diné lore, people possessing two spirits were blessed with twice the spiritual gifts, both male and female, and thus had special powers to oversee healing rituals and other sacred ceremonies. Hasbaá and Will grew close and fell in love. The Diné celebrated their union, as was their custom.

Will discovered Carlton's treachery so with the help of Hasbaá and other Diné, set out to prove Carlton's unworthiness as leader. Some of Williams and Johnson's characters, such as General James Carlton, were actual people who played significant roles in the circumstances surrounding the Navajo's incarceration. In TWO SPIRITS' pages, the authors show how spirituality, wisdom, and true understanding of human nature existed among the native people of our continent for thousands of years before European settlers arrived.

Williams and Johnson's TWO SPIRITS is a very important work with far reaching social significance. TWO SPIRITS is a highly recommended five star read.

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Student Support Services Library, located at Bloomington Indiana, STAFF PICKS

by Sarah Stumpf

Do you like historical fiction? How about standing up to corruption, challenging racism, and falling in love?

Two Spirits: A Story of Life With the Navajo by Walter L. Williams and Toby Johnson is one of the best fiction books I have read in a long time. Johnson is an award-winning gay writer and Williams is an expert in same-sex relationships among the Navajo (or Diné as they prefer to be called). Together they create a beautiful work of fiction that blends historical truth with compelling fictional characters.

Shortly after the Civil War Will Lee arrives in the harsh desert of New Mexico to be the new Indian Agent at Fort Sumner and to escape his fire-and-brimstone father. He quickly finds himself captivated by Hasbaá, a Diné two-spirit, a man who lives like a woman and has a sacred role in the community. Her gender transitivity fascinates and frightens him, as he is forced to examine himself, his spiritual beliefs, and his place in this world.

Is he falling for her? Can he help expose the corruption of the Army officials in charge of the fort as well as face his own racism? Is he willing to give up the privileges of being a 'straight' white man to live in the Diné's world? And would she even have him if he was able to get over his own issues?

You could call this book gay fiction or trans fiction, but the labels don't matter as much as the strong characters, sexual and sensual relationships, beautifully harsh settings, and historical realism that Williams and Johnson are able to create.

Washington Blade (Aug 8, 2006)

Exploring a spiritual history (Gay)

New novel about a gay Navajo and his white lover examines gay identity

By GREG MARZULLO

Tuesday, August 08, 2006

The history of gay identity on the North American continent is totally absent from the educational system of the United States, and until recent years, the travails of the American Indians have been reduced to the myths of the bloodthirsty Injun or the noble savage.

With "Two Spirits: A Story of Life With the Navajo," gay authors Walter L. Williams and Toby Johnson deftly unveil the great histories of gay people as seen through the mythic and cultural expressions of the Navajo.

The novel is set shortly after the end of the Civil War, when Will Lee, a white Virginian, runs away from home upon being discovered naked with his best friend by his stridently religious father. Will joins up with the Office of Indian Affairs and heads out West to his new post at Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

The Navajo were forced to live in the parched desert surrounding Sumner after the U.S. Army drove them from their ancestral lands in what is now northern Arizona. The tribe remained at the fort as prisoners from 1863 until 1867 when they were restored to their homelands.

While there, Will falls in love with Hasbaá, a "two spirit" shaman of the tribe.

"The Navajo as well as many other American Indians honored people -- who we today would call gay -- as spiritually gifted," says Johnson. "They were understood to possess both the spirit of a man and the spirit of a woman."

Two spirit people usually displayed signs of gender variance by dressing in clothing that was opposite of their biological gender and engaging in activities that were nontraditional for their gender. They held a spiritual position of honor within the community and worked as healers and intermediaries between the human and spirit worlds.

"The way America thinks of homosexuals is not as spiritual leaders," says Johnson. I think in the long run it's more important that gay people change how we understand homosexuality than it is how we get straight people to change their minds about it."

THE AWAKENING OF gay consciousness, one of the book's central themes, is nothing new to the writings of either author. Johnson's nonfiction works "Gay Spirituality" and "Gay Perspective" have become classics in the queer spirit genre, and Williams, currently a senior professor in the gender studies program at the University of Southern California, wrote a seminal book on the two spirit phenomenon titled "The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture."

Both writers seamlessly weave their academic backgrounds into the fabric of Will's and Hasbaá's story. Surrounded by the culture and myths of the Navajo people, Will begins to embrace his sexuality as a vehicle toward liberation, happiness and a deepening sense of empowerment.

"One of the great mythological patterns is that people become heroes not because they set out to be a hero, but because they got drawn into it because of personal drive," says Johnson. "Those personal drives are more sexual most of the time. In writing a gay story, we wanted to be more open about the sexuality."

Researchers like Williams have determined that two spirit shamans regularly engaged in same-sex eroticism and even married their paramours.

"Same-sex marriage is as American as apple pie," Johnson laughs. "On American soil, there has been same-sex marriage for 5,000 years. It's the Christians who came along and objected 200 years ago. They're the new ones."

Book Marks, Sept 25, 2006

Review by Richard Labonte

Two Spirits: A Story of Life with the Navajo, by Walter L. Williams and Toby Johnson. Lethe Press, 332 pages, \$18 paper

Clichéd passion between the Sensitive White Man and the Noble Savage has been a subset of gay romantic and erotic fiction since Richard Amory's *Song of the Loon* set the standard almost five decades ago. The bar has been raised much, much higher by this compassionate collaboration between academic Williams, whose scholarly *The Spirit and the Flesh* explored sexual diversity in American Indian culture, and novelist Johnson, whose several books blend gay fiction with spiritual wisdom. Their enchanting and suspenseful romance, set in Navajo-territory New Mexico shortly after the Civil War, eschews those unfortunate

cliches: the young Virginian and the two-spirit native who come to love each other here are fully dimensional characters. The story hews closely to real history, too, as it recounts the callous eviction of the Navajo from their sacred homelands, a shameful era of cultural oppression and brutal discrimination in America. *Two Spirits* bristles with an angry depiction of regrettable history, but any hint of didactic overload is totally tempered by fine writing.

RFD, Winter 2006-07

Review by B

Two Spirits, A Story of Life with the Navajo
by Walter L. Williams & Toby Johnson
Lethe Press, 331 pages, 2006

"Two Spirits, A story of Life With the Navajo", is an eminently accessible novel. It is written with joy and sensitivity and successfully evokes the post-Civil War era. In addition, it offers a lucid and simple (at times almost too simple) view of Dine (the word the Navajo peoples have for themselves) spirituality and the unique role of the Two Spirit people in Dine culture.

In the first three chapters we are introduced to the hero, Will Lee (a distant relative of Robert E.) who arrives at Ft. Sumner NM to take up duties as an apprentice to the Indian Agent. Following chapters alternate between his earlier life in Virginia and his experiences at the Fort. Will, we learn, has had some questions about his sexuality; had a brief romantic/ sexual experience with his best friend, Michael; and is discovered just after the act by his Bible-thumping father with the expected dire consequences. Michael escapes to Norfolk to follow his dream of becoming a sailor; and Will, through the intervention of a local lawyer is given a copy of Walt Whitman's recently published "Leaves of Grass"; given a letter of introduction to the lawyer's friend in the Department of the Interior and encouraged to escape to Washington, D.C. where he is assigned to the post at Ft. Sumner.

Through this devise of alternating episodes between his earlier life and life at the fort, a picture of a sensitive and caring, though confused young man emerges. He meets, and is very attracted to Hasbaa, a Dine Two Spirit spiritual leader of his/her people. Will is appalled at the destitute conditions to which the Dine are subjected by General Carlson, the Fort Commander, and gradually discovers the extent of the General's perfidy.

Love blooms between Will and Hasbaa and as he learns about the Dine life and spirituality the reader gains a clear picture of the profound reverence for life and the joyous and innocent sexuality evidenced by the people. The device works well and the adventure provided by the pursuit and ultimate downfall of Gen. Carlson and the return of the Dine to their homeland makes for a satisfying tale.

If you are interested in Native American culture and spirituality I highly recommend "Two Spirits". It will be a treasured addition to your library.

Midwest Book Review Dec. 2006

by Lori L. Lake, author

This is the first work of fiction I've read that speaks about the world of the berdache with such clarity, depth, and soulfulness. The novel draws much of its historical fact and information from Walter L. Williams' nonfiction book THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH: SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE, but despite its historical base, the book never feels dry. Instead, it is lively, entertaining, and a fascinating look at a time gone by when two people from completely different cultures came together as friends, lovers, and trusted allies to prevail over an enemy that seemed impossible to defeat. Highly recommended.

Ashe Journal Vol 5, Issue 4

Also from Toby Johnson, this time joined by anthropologist Walter Williams, comes a new work of historical fiction: Two Spirits: A Story of Life With the Navajo (Lethe Press, 2006, 331pp, \$18.00). Set in the Civil War era of the 1860's, Two Spirits tells the story of a feckless Virginian who finds himself captivated by a Two-Spirit male. This is a fascinating book that combines tragedy and oppression with a tale of love, beauty and self-discovery.

Barnes & Noble.com

This book I could not put down, with its visual beauty and its base in historical truth, I found it enthralling. I am most grateful to learn yet another piece of who we are, and understand more fully why we are here.

--- Craig A. Lee

Lambda Book Report

Winter 2007

BY THOM NICKELS

Novels are generally written by one author, but *Two Spirits: A Story of Life with the Navajo*, is co-authored by Walter L. Williams and Toby Johnson. Williams, of course, is known for his classic overview of Native American sexuality. *The Spirit and the Flesh*, a must-read for anyone interested in American (sexual) history or Native American life. In that work Williams explains the dynamics and the ways of the berdache, or the Two Spirited-third gendered male, usually gay, who would often dress as a member of the opposite sex, take a husband or wife (Two Spirited persons were male or female) and live among the tribe as a shaman or holy person. As a link between male and female, such persons were thought to have the ability to tap into mystical realms, and to create powerful influences among the tribe.

Toby Johnson, the author of a number of spiritual books and former editor of *White Crane Journal*, a gay men's journal of spirituality, is a logical choice to team with Williams. Being on the same page spiritually would indeed be a prerequisite for such a venture.

The novel follows the adventures of Will, a young son-of-a--preacher man who runs away from home after his father discovers him in the arms of his best friend, circa 1868, in—as it turns out—a not so secret hayloft in the family barn.

Will runs away from home because he fears for his life and because his preacher father (a 19th century version of the Religious Right) seeks to make an example of him before the congregation. Will feels that his father will hang him although at one point he contemplates hanging himself. He alters course when he runs to a family friend, an older unmarried man and Walt Whitman devotee, who lectures him on the value of people who are "different." Although homosexuality or same sex attraction is never mentioned per se, the old man talks to Will about the love of comrades, and Will, if only

subliminally, gets the message. The old man also suggests that Will leave home immediately for Washington D.C. to see a friend of his in the government who might be able to get him a job.

This promise of employment is the springboard for Will's new life, and he ventures forth into the bureaucratic labyrinths of Washington D.C. where his introduction pays off. The old man's network of "secret comrade friends" helps the young man obtain the dangerous yet exciting job as an Indian Agent. What follows is the story of how young Will travels to the displaced homeland of the Navajo people (who yearn for their original home in New Mexico) and how he slowly integrates himself into their community.

On the reservation Will encounters top military brass hostile to Native American interests; indeed, all the standard anti-Indian prejudices of the day are in full bloom there. Complicating matters, Will meets the Navajo Two Spirit, Hasbaa, and begins a personal odyssey of self discovery. His fascination for Hasbaa leads eventually to a consummated love relationship or marriage within the tribe that has dire consequences for Will both personally and professionally.

The authors' acute eye for historical detail and fact make this a historical novel worth reading. This combination adventure story, history lesson, and love story/soap opera are as compelling as the early novels of Herman Hesse. While the straightforward narrative can sometimes have a "young adult" feel, the book is a page turner nonetheless.

This is perfectly in context in this historically important and even beautiful story.

Thom Nickels is a Philadelphia-based author/journalist/ playwright, and the author of eight published books including *Out in History* and *Philadelphia Architecture*.

An Exceptional Spiritual Adventure in Cross Cultural Love

June 14, 2007

By Fred Stewart

I found Two Spirits to be a delightful and entertaining book bringing together compelling history, culture, romance, and spirituality. The authors vividly tell the story of the historical plight of the Navajo (Dine) tribe forced to languish in an extremely hostile environment

far away from their homeland in an experiment in Indian management" by the U.S. military following the Civil War.

The writing is lucid and the characters are exceptionally well-developed. I readily experienced the hardships and the profound spirituality of the tribe as I entered their world and joined the journey. The tribal ways, rituals, and governing are rich in detail. I became aware that under the horrendous hardships the tribe managed to maintain an enduring sense of human hope, trust, and love. Tribal members displayed this love and trust for each other and their spiritual leader. The eventual acceptance of the "hairy face" (as the Native Americans referred to white men) into the tribe's midst is a lesson of tolerance and acceptance, especially when contrasted by the ugliness of discrimination practiced by the tribe's so-called 'protectors'.

Two Spirits is a must read for anyone who seeks to understand an aspect of Native American culture that has been denied far too long.

GAY SHAMANS AS HEROES AND WARRIORS

A Book Review by Lewis Elbinger

Walter L. Williams and Toby Johnson, *Two Spirits: A Story of Life with the Navajo*,
Lethe Press, New Jersey, 2006, 331 pages

Some books have veils over them. That means you cannot read them until you are ready for the message contained therein. *Two Spirits: A Story of Life with the Navajo* was such a book for me. I bought it immediately after it was published, but it sat on my shelf for almost a year before the veil was lifted and I could enter the world the authors created and described.

Perhaps the barrier that prevented me from plunging into this novel of American frontier life in the 1860s was the harsh and accurate description of the injustices suffered by the Native Americans at that time. I found the situation too painful to contemplate and refused to do so. When the veil was finally lifted, I was surprised and delighted to find a plot that veered from comedy to horror and back with an underlying message of hope, triumph and redemption. At one point I was moved to tears by the magnificence of the characters and the skillful

manner in which they were portrayed. That, the shedding of a joyful tear evoked by artistic talent, is the surest sign for me that the authors have succeeded in their mission.

This book reminded me once again of the power of fiction to reflect and affect the so-called "real world." Toby Johnson literally wrote the book on gay spirituality (Toby Johnson, *Gay Spirituality*, Lethe Press, New Jersey, 2004, 296 pages). Here, with co-author Walter Williams, he delivers a message about the beauty, power and glory of gay shamans in the guise of historical fiction. The book has several levels: it is a story about the love between two men from radically different worlds, about the differences between those worlds and, ultimately, about the reconciliation of those worlds. The plot hinges on historical characters, situations and places, but incorporates a variety of elements, including magical realism, that make the story memorable, interesting and exciting.

The word "Navajo" is the Spanish name of a Native American tribe that calls itself Dine which means "the people." In the 1860s, the Dine suffered a devastation comparable that experienced by the Jews in Nazi Germany. They were forcibly deported from their homeland and relocated to a barren track of land outside of Fort Sumner in what is currently New Mexico. Their violent resistance to this deportation provided the excuse for further oppression. With little food, water or shelter, people died by the thousands. Eventually, the Dine made a treaty with the U.S. government that allowed them to return to their homeland from the brink of extinction.

Certain heroic and decent personalities among both the Dine and U.S. government facilitated this fortuitous conclusion. In this fictionalized version of the story, Williams and Johnson posit a love affair between a young Indian Agent from Virginia named William Lee and a Dine nadleehi (gay shaman) named Hasbaá. While the plot contains the heart-pounding twists and turns of an exciting movie, the underlying message of the book is William Lee's discovery, understanding and acceptance of Dine holistic and humane cosmology in contrast to the cosmology of his own tribe of rapacious and callous Americans. The love between Lee and Hasbaá served as a bridge between two utterly diverse and hostile cultures. This love allowed healing, growth and understanding to develop in an atmosphere in which only violence, oppression and cruelty flourished.

Love exists on four levels: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. It was the spiritual bond between the white American and the red Native American that

drew them together and allowed them to foster reconciliation between their antagonistic societies. William Lee's curiosity and fascination with Dine culture and religion in general and with Hasbaá's exalted position as a religious figure in that culture in particular opened a window onto a world which was closed to most white Americans. The reader is privileged to gaze over Lee's shoulder as he peers into the forbidden and foreign world that most of Lee's compatriots considered savage and barbaric. One wonders who is the savage and who is the barbarian when the truth is known about the values and behaviors of each society.

One message of Toby Johnson's considerable literary output is that the homosexual perspective makes a valuable and necessary contribution to the evolution of human consciousness. This book presents the same idea in an entertaining, interesting and enlightening way. After finishing the book, I bought three copies of it as gifts for friends who would appreciate the concept of same-sex love as a vehicle for intercultural understanding.

TWO SPIRITS REVIEW

by Ruth Sims [Reviews by Ruth](#)

Two Spirits combines a moving love story with a dark part of American history. Most Americans know, and choose to ignore, the historic treatment of the peoples who "were here first," the broken treaties, the broken promises, the broken hearts and lives. It would be silly to pretend that the Indians (if I may use that non-p.c. term) didn't war among themselves because they did. But they didn't have machine guns and railroad trains and the belief that God gave them all the land from coast to coast, a.k.a. "manifest destiny." Two Spirits is about one small group caught on the dark side of that manifest destiny: the people Americans called Navajo, but who called themselves Diné.

In 1864 the Diné were forced to walk 325 miles in winter from their green, fertile homeland in what we call Northeast Arizona, Canyon de Chelly, to what was actually a concentration camp at Bosque Redondo near Fort Sumner. At least 3,000 of their number died on the way. This was General James Carlton's version of "pacifying" the natives. Carlton, by the way, was a real person. The U.S. Government allocated what probably was sufficient money for the displaced Diné to feed, clothe, and house them, but the money found its way into Carlton's private coffers. Not only were the Diné starving and unable to grow crops in the

inhospitable land, living in substandard shacks, and dying from illnesses, Mexican bandits regularly struck from what became New Mexico, carrying the Diné children to be sold into slavery. Carlton did nothing to protect his charges.

Into this living hell comes a shy, uncertain and untrained Indian Agent named William Lee from Virginia, a young man kicked out by his father for loving another man. Young Will is truly tested by many fires—both from within and without. He's puzzled why he's fascinated and attracted to the beautiful healer and wise woman, Hasbaá, a loved and revered member of the tribe. A near-tragedy reveals Hasbaá's physical strength and Will soon learns that the beautiful, spiritual, strong woman is really a male—a two-spirit. Far from being shunned, as she would have been in white society, Hasbaá is considered blessed. Will and Hasbaá fall deeply in love and are joined in a union by the customs of the tribe.

There is plenty of action and danger in this book, as Will, the Diné, and Hasbaá face persecution and annihilation when Will uncovers Carlton's corruption and evil. He delves deeply into the life and spirituality of the Diné and his beloved Hasbaá.

As an incurable reader of forewords, afterwords, and footnotes, I especially appreciated the commentaries at the end. "About the Historical Accuracy of This Novel" is as interesting as the book itself, explaining as it does about, among other things, the use of peyote, some of the mystical references, and the acceptance of two-spirit people. This is followed by "A Commentary" by Wesley K. Thomas, a member of the Diné. These brief extras are the cherry on top of the sundae.

Highly recommended!

Ruth Sims is author of the wonderful romance novel [The Phoenix](#)