

## REVIEWS OF The Bone War of McCurtain County by Russell Ferrell

### Donovan's Bookshelf

Pick of the Month:  
Quite simply the single best  
book of that month's  
Recommended Reading!  
From the April 2017 Issue  
[The Bone War of McCurtain County](#)  
Russell Ferrell  
Rabelais Publishing  
978-0-9833551-6-8 \$16.95  
<http://a.co/4iooHMX>

A scientific, corporate, and political war fueled by a strange discovery sounds like fodder for fiction; but the special delight of *The Bone War of McCurtain County: A True Tale of Two Men's Quest for Treasure, Truth, and Justice* lies in the fact that this Indiana Jones-style adventure is, in fact, nonfiction. Seldom is a gripping read like this replete with so many insights into special interests and social, scientific and political subterfuge, but *The Bone War* is a stellar example of what happens when reality runs head-on into special interests on all sides. This vivid, well-detailed story of a clash between cultures is hard to put down and very highly recommended as an engrossing, unique scientific saga.

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### Review by Diane Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review

*The Bone War of McCurtain County: A True Tale of Two Men's Quest for Treasure, Truth, and Justice* is an extraordinary biography and true-life adventure story that began, oddly enough, with a visit to a small Oklahoma rock shop during a vacation, where the proprietor's extraordinary story immersed Russell Ferrell's son in the strange tale of a paleontological "bone war" fought over dinosaur remains and land rights in the unlikely setting of Oklahoma.

The war began when an Arkansas hillbilly and a Choctaw Indian stumbled upon, unearthed, and claimed a fossil prize from a waste-holding pit. The battle that followed would immerse corporate, scientific, and political interests in an unprecedented conflict over rights, ownership, and scientific advancement that even boiled over into religious concerns.

One of the delights of *The Bone War of McCurtain County* lies in the presentation of this vivid story, which embraces hoaxes, dreams, legal processes, scientific revelations, and a buried treasure that changed the lives of all who touched it. It's not easy incorporating the drama of a thriller or an Indiana Jones adventure style into a nonfiction piece that winds through many special interests with a solid attention to not taking the easy way out and which steps solidly on the toes of politicians, lawyers, and scientists who became immersed in a whirlwind of questions about ownership and rights.

Even more exceptional is the careful detailing of the clash of cultures sparked by the extraordinary discovery: "The two homespun Okies ostensibly clashed with the two academicians - culturally, regionally, educationally, occupationally, socially, and economically. There was an unmistakable divergence between their backgrounds. This became even more apparent the longer the two blue-collar workers sat across the table from the two white-collared scholars, and their interaction noted by curious burger-devouring patrons sitting nearby. There was an unbridgeable difference between their hardscrabble world, and Langston's refined, scholarly sphere."

The attention to this detail and insights are such that this book holds even more important implications on other levels for a country divided by class, culture, and politics: "Lawyers were seen as part of that exclusively rich "green zone" (not botanical green, but dollar green) of the American landscape. This was a particularly vivid perception for disgruntled working stiffs who couldn't afford their services.

Detached legal elitists perched on piles of cash and plush corporate nostrums have delusively presumed that everything was on par with John Q. Public; however, in reality, things were not as idyllic out in the hinterland as they imagined. There was a groundswell of disillusionment and outright contempt for the profession and system. To many people looking inward at the system from an outside vantage point, the system looked broken and hopelessly corrupt."

Under a different hand, the Indiana Jones-style drama could have translated into a one-dimensional production; but the delight of *The Bone War of McCurtain County* is that so many levels are covered in depth and detail - and yet, the flavor of an adventure story is retained throughout. *The Bone War of McCurtain County* is very, very highly recommended as a top read across genres, from general-interest readers to those who regularly pursue histories in scientific, political, and social circles.

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## **Review by Divine Zape for Readers' Favorite**

As the subtitle suggests, *The Bone War of McCurtain County* by Russell Ferrell is a true tale of two men's quest for treasure, truth, and justice, a non-fiction narrative that is loaded with adventure. Two determined rookie naturalists on a historic hunt, a treasure of incomparable value, and a powerful clash of interests are just a few of the plot points that make this narrative an irresistible and pulsating read, enriched by elements of history and facts around which the story evolves. Among the treasures found near the edge of the Mountain Fork River, and excavated by Cephis Hall, an Arkansas hillbilly, and Sid Love, a Choctaw Indian, was a world class dinosaur specimen, one of the discoveries that eventually sold for \$3.5 million to the North Carolina Museum of Science. The reader is pulled into a world of controversy, greed and machinations involving powerful entities fighting over the ownership rights of the find. Can Cephis and Sid beat one of the most powerful landowners and the influence of their connections and lay claim to something that is rightfully theirs?

Russell Ferrell takes a historical event and transforms it into an engrossing read, exploring characters and the setting with the skill of a seasoned writer. The author explores the backgrounds of his two key characters deftly, allowing readers vivid and clear glimpses into their way of life and where they come from. Descriptive elements are well integrated into the setting and the reader is transported into the heart of nature — the moonshine, hills, hogs, quartz crystals, and pot fields. *The Bone War of McCurtain County* is a story about human greed and corruption in high places, but it's also a story filled with intrigue. In a fast-paced and very engaging tale, the author builds a powerful conflict, plunging readers into the hidden motives of the hearts of the characters.

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## **Review by Carol Hoyer for Reader Views (7/17)**

“The Bone War of McCurtain County” by Russell Ferrell is a true story about two backwoods naturalists who discovered a world-class dinosaur specimen in the 1980s. The story is not only a very informative read, it also provides significant facts on dinosaur bones and how this book came into being. Ferrell provides a very detailed prologue on how he came to meet Cephis Hall, and why he chose to write about the history and the people of Arkansas and Oklahoma.

Cephis Hall and Sid Love were born naturalists who loved to explore and increase their knowledge of crystals and fossils. On the journey with these two down-to-earth men, readers will experience many emotions as they discover one of the biggest finds of dinosaur bones in history, and their fight with those who want to take this history away from them. Typically, many large corporations ignore those “little people” until they find that they have something of value.

I found the background on the term “hillbilly” to be very interesting and how, like today, there is a particular class of people who think they are better than everyone else. Through Ferrell's descriptions, readers will see that these “hillbillies” were family-oriented, dedicated, honest and God-fearing people. They worked hard for what little they had, often having to relocate thousands of miles just to feed their families.

The author does an excellent job of presenting historical facts, portraying in full-color Hall and Love, and describing corporate America’s need to control everything. It was inspiring to read how these two men held tight to their beliefs and work ethics, and went head-to-head with large corporations to save what was rightfully theirs. The only downside to this read is that the extensive historical background sometimes detracted from the two heroes of the story and the challenges they experienced. That said however, I do believe the history was absolutely relevant to the story.

“The Bone War of McCurtain County” is a creative, engaging, and informative read. Ferrell’s writing is well researched, and readers will feel his great passion for Hall and Love as he tells their story and honors their place in history.