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Saints at the River: A Novel

By Ron Rash



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Saints at the River: A Novel By Ron Rash

A major new Southern voice emerges in this novel about a town divided by the aftermath of a tragic accident--and the woman caught in the middle

When a twelve-year-old girl drowns in the Tamassee River and her body is trapped in a deep eddy, the people of the small South Carolina town that bears the river's name are thrown into the national spotlight. The girl's parents want to attempt a rescue of the body; environmentalists are convinced the rescue operation will cause permanent damage to the river and set a dangerous precedent. Torn between the two sides is Maggie Glenn, a twenty-eight-year-old newspaper photographer who grew up in the town and has been sent to document the incident. Since leaving home almost ten years ago, Maggie has done her best to avoid her father, but now, as the town's conflict opens old wounds, she finds herself revisiting the past she's fought so hard to leave behind. Meanwhile, the reporter who's accompanied her to cover the story turns out to have a painful past of his own, and one that might stand in the way of their romance. Drawing on the same lyrical prose and strong sense of place that distinguished his award-winning first novel, *One Foot in Eden*, Ron Rash has written a book about the deepest human themes: the love of the land, the hold of the dead on the living, and the need to dive beneath the surface to arrive at a deeper truth. *Saints at the River* confirms the arrival of one of today's most gifted storytellers.



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Saints at the River: A Novel By Ron Rash Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #86932 in Books
- Brand: Picador
- Published on: 2005-07-01
- Released on: 2005-06-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.28" h x .70" w x 5.45" l, .52 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 239 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

When the 12-year-old daughter of a wealthy banker drowns in South Carolina's Tamassee River, her death sets off an emotionally charged battle between the grieving parents, who want to put up a dam to recover her body, and the local environmentalists, who will risk everything to defend the pristine state of their river. Rash pens his novel in clear, unadorned prose appropriate to its ripped-from-the-headlines premise; only the lyrical opening passage, which recounts the girl's death, reflects his skill as a poet (*Among the Believers; Raising the Dead*). But the book is rich with nuance, mostly because Rash selects Maggie Glenn as his first-person narrator. A Tamassee native who now works as a news photographer in the state capital, Columbia, Maggie has deep ties to the town, but she's detached from the main fray. As a result, her news angles and her romantic attachments keep shifting. Maggie's rage against her father isn't sufficiently explored to carry the weight it bears in the plot, but Rash compensates for this weakness by creating detailed, highly particular characters. A professor of Appalachian Studies at Western Carolina University and author of a previous Southern novel, *One Foot in Eden*, Rash clearly knows the people and places he writes about, and that authenticity pays off in a conclusion that packs an unexpected and powerful punch.

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From [Booklist](#)

In his second novel set in Appalachia, poet Rash blends a classic environmental struggle with a budding romance. A young girl drowns in South Carolina's Tamassee River, her body lodged in a deep eddy, making it impossible to retrieve except by damming the river upstream. Backed by the Wild and Scenic River Act, environmentalists protest loudly. Photographer Maggie Glenn, who grew up in Tamassee, is assigned by her paper to cover the story, along with reporter Allen Hemphill, a Pulitzer finalist whose work Maggie admires. Locals objecting to precedents that would allow future alterations to the pristine river are pitted against the drowned girl's parents, who make an impassioned plea for the recovery of her remains. At the same time, Maggie and Allen's relationship gradually shifts from professional to romantic, as he begins to put aside memories of the deaths of his wife and daughter. Appalachian dialects and Rash's lyrical description of this small Appalachian town create a strong sense of place, adding to his well-spoken plea against the devastation caused by damming the nation's rivers. *Deborah Donovan*

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Review

"A compelling novel...Rash tells his story with subtlety and with the best kind of empathy." *The Wall Street Journal*

"Captivating...Rash's clear, concise prose and regional voice add an authentic veneer to this rich tableau of Southern life." *Entertainment Weekly*

"Ron Rash writes like a prince." *Pat Conroy*

"Maggie is an ideal observer from the center for things. Her knowing voice carries us through this sad, complex, and beautiful story." *Time Out (New York)*

"Rash's clean prose and love for the land easily carry this book to its conclusion, providing readers with a powerful ending that is both surprising and well earned." *The Charlotte Observer*

“Shows [Rash's] versatility andchutzpah...Rash's prose... has a peculiar headlong drive akin to that of hard-boiled detective novels--the best sort.” ?*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“Fluid...Rash's prose sparkles....He does the best thing a writer can do: entrench the reader in a scene.”
? *Greensboro News & Record*

“Gripping...Spare, resonant, unputdownable.” ?*Kirkus Reviews (starred review)*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Karla Whisenant:

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