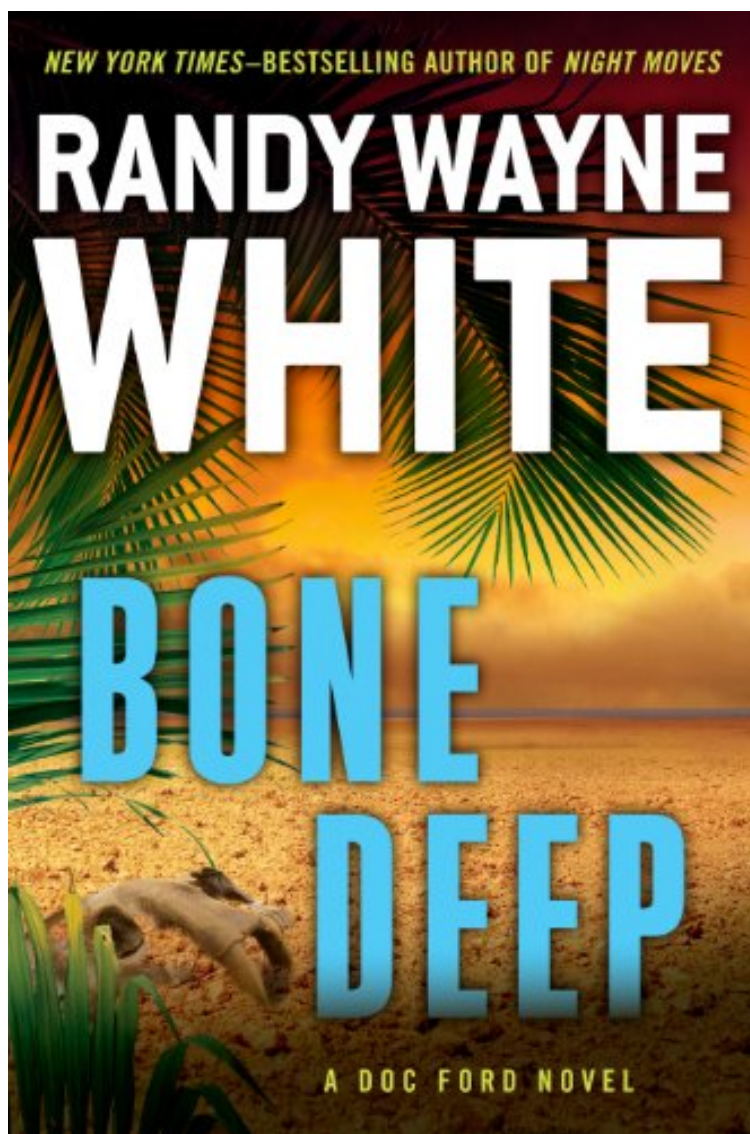


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# Bone Deep



*Par Randy Wayne White  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe stunning new thriller from the New York Times bestselling author. When a Crow Indian acquaintance of Tomlinsons asks him to help recover a relic stolen from his tribe, Doc Ford is happy to tag alongbut neither Doc nor Tomlinson realize what theyve let themselves in for. Their search takes them to the part of Central Florida known as Bone Valley, famous primarily for two things: a ruthless subculture of black-marketers who trade in illegal artifacts and fossils, and a multibillion-dollar phosphate industry whose strip mines compromise the very ground they walk on. Neither enterprise tolerates nosy outsiders. For each, public exposure equals big financial lossesand in a region built on a million-year accumulation of bones, there is no shortage of spots in which to hide a corpse. Or two.ExtraitONEA big chunk of central Florida is known as Bone Valley to geologists and antiquities thieves, as I was reminded by a stranger

wearing braids and wrangler denim who appeared on my porch one stormy June morning. The man claimed to be on the trail of artifacts stolen from Crow tribal land in Montana. Stone carvings about yay high, he said, holding his fingers apart. They didnt come from Bone Valley, but Florida is where a lot of tribal stuff ends up. My stilthouse on Sanibel Island, the Gulf Coast, is four hours from Orlando, and two thousand miles from Big Sky Country. You sure you have the right Marion Ford? Youre Doc? Yeah, but not the kind you need. A marine biologist who doesnt read his horoscope, thats what I heard. You could be just the guy. I was standing outside my lab, water slapping at pilings below my feet, thunderheads sliding our way. What does astrology have to do with stolen artifacts? The man, who had introduced himself as Duncan Fallsdown, said, Tonight, at whats supposed to be a sweat lodge, it would be nice to have a buffer. You know, someone who talks about some- thing other than Mother Earth and spirit quests all the standard stuff Ive heard a million times. A hawk circles overhead, a guy like you figures the birds hungry, looking for a mouse. A snake, maybe. No big deal. Am I right? I said, A sweat lodge in June? If thats an invitation, no thanks. Not the best timing, but Im committed, Fallsdown replied, his eyes moving to the bay where a sailboat was anchored. The boats boom was strung with laundry that flapped in the breeze: a tie-dyed shirt, several sarongs, and what appeared to be womens lingerie. Suddenly, the nonsensical was redefined as commonplace. Tomlinsons behind this, I said. How long have you known him? I was referring to a lecherous, cannabis-growing anarchist turned Zen master who lives aboard the sailboat, an old Morgan, No Ms in faded script on the stern. Long enough to leave last night, when he chugged a tray of Jell-O shooters and invited some women to go skinny-dipping, the man replied. That was around one. I flew in late yesterday afternoon. Yep definitely bras and panties clipped to the Morgans hal- yard, all doomed to be soaked by the rain rumbling toward us. You do know him, I said. How many? Women? At least one that was married, so I didnt bother counting. Theyre here because of the sweat lodge. Fallsdown considered the squall, then looked beyond me through the screen door. Man . . . youve got a bunch of aquariums in there. As a kid, I always wanted one. What kind of fish? It was a request to escape the rain, so I opened the door, asking, What time did Tomlinson start drinking this morning? Fallsdowns shoulders filled the doorway, his Indian braids black on blue cowboy denim, and I got a whiff of what might have been smokesquite, maybe, not tobacco or marijuana. Answer that one, he replied, Id have to know what time he stopped last night, wouldnt I? DUNCAN FALLSDOWN, who told me to call him Dunk with a k, accepted a bottle of Gatorade after refusing a beer, saying, Im hop-tose intolerant, which might have meant ten a.m. was too early or the gentle rebuff of an alcoholic. A man in his mid-forties acquires seismic markers at the corners of the eyes sharp winters, smoky bar- rooms, is what I saw. I dumped my coffee and made fresh while wind blew the first fat drops of rain against the roof. Twice, while water boiled, I went to the door and whistled, then made small talk until Fallsdown followed me outside, across the breezeway, into the old ice house I have converted into a lab. I showed him around, explained what I do for a living collect and sell marine specimens, plus environmental consulting then went to the door again, When you crossed the boardwalk, did you happen to see a dog swimming around near my house? That was a dog? Fallsdown replied. Surprise with a tinge of wariness the typical reaction of a newcomer who thinks he has seen what is probably an alligator but could be a giant otter. A few minutes later, I returned, and my yellow-eyed retriever was drying in the breezeway, a fresh bone to occupy him, while Fallsdown and I talked above the hiss of rain. These stone carvings, someone I know wants them back. Dollarwise, theyre fairly valuable, but thats not the reason. The persons in a hurry. Tomorrow, theres a flea market near Venice I want to hit. Then a gun show in Lakeland. You dont know where the artifacts are? Ive got some contacts, and Tomlinsons working on some other thats why Im here. MapQuest says the trips three hours. Over an hour to Venice, then two hours to Lakeland, I guessed. But double that if Tomlinsons driving. Fallsdown, focusing on fish tanks along the wall, kept his back to me. You know the guy better than I do. Hes not as flaky as he pretends, sometimes. Hes got good instincts, too, and people trust him. Better than having just me show up, a cowboy-Indian dressed like Billy Jack, asking questions about artifacts that might sell for fifty, sixty grand. See what Im saying? I was surprised by the numbers. At a flea market? Its the sort of place dealers use now. Used to be, the quality stuff was sold at auctions or antiquities shows. Coins, arrowheads, fossils Florida had some of the biggest shows in the country. Vegas was big. New Mexico used to be, but the Indian relics trade has mostly gone underground. States are cracking down, Florida included, but its still one of the worlds best places for finding fossils and relics. The moneys here, so the dealers keep coming. I was sitting at my computer and broke a personal rule by turning on the Wi-Fi before Id finished the morning grunt work required of an aquarist who owns two boats. These artifacts, do you have a link where I can find photos? Ive got a folder in my rental car when the rain slows down. The carvings dont look

like much black soapstone steatite, its called. Some say the pieces look like owl faces. Just the face? Judge for yourself, but they're plain-looking stones. Not nearly as pretty as agate coral. They find a lot of that near Tampa, but other areas, too. Phosphate quarries are best. There were plenty of quarries. . Phosphate mining has been a major Florida industry since the early 1900s, which Fallsdown already knew. A million years ago, he said, inland Florida was high ground with rivers, and animals that collected there in the river basins and watering holes died there. That's why they call the area Bone Valley. Awesome fossils mixed in with stone tools from the Paleo era sort of one-stop shopping. Spend an afternoon digging the right spot, you could buy a car with what you find. Hell, a ranch, if you really got lucky. Fallsdown looked around, his expression congenial; he had the easygoing confidence of a plumber or a electrician, but that didn't quite mesh with his knowledge of Florida geology. Are you a private investigator? Not hardly. Studied the field sciences in college? On the computer screen I had opened photos of agate corals, all polished pink, silver, or cinnamon by the pressure of eons, each piece uniquely hollowed like a geode or miniature cave. Fallsdown replied, Nope. But I did three years in the joint, two as library trustee Deer Lodge state prison. Lots of reading time. I said, Oh, while he focused on a hundred-gallon tank where I had isolated three fingerling snooka triad of silver blades suspended above a mangrove diorama. But you are a . . . a member of the Crow tribe. In an Indiana Skin, if that's what you mean. You don't have to be careful around me. I make decent money putting on shows for tourists, and the politically correct bullshit really gets old. That's how Tomlinson and I met. Sedona, Arizona. Sedona attracts every UFO kook and crystal worshipper around, but we hit it off. That was back in my drinking days, so I forgot what a pain in the ass he can be. Fallsdown put his face closer to the aquarium glass. What are those spiny things? He meant the sea urchins. Then he asked about tunicates and barnacles their rhythmic, feathered appendages were actually modified legs and the anomaly of pregnant male sea horses, before he got back to the subject. Look up Mastodon tusks and see what they sell for. Most are from phosphate quarries, or rivers south of Orlando. Maybe Clovis tools, too, or Charmstones, but don't get your hopes up. Dealers have stopped selling over the Internet. The man sipped at his Gatorade while I banged away with two fingers at the keyboard. Then Fallsdown decided to trust me with more information. It's my aunt who wants the carvings back. She did some crazy stuff after she ran off and left her husband and kids. Organized protests, the whole nine yards, even got her picture in newspapers when AIM had a standoff with the feds. Which sort of puts me in an awkward spot. I stopped what I was doing and chose my words carefully. Awkward because of what your aunt did? Or because she . . . knows Tomlinson? My strange pal is a womanizer, and had mentioned his involvement with the American Indian Movement many times. The man from Montana thought about that for a few seconds. Maybe that hippie snake did sleep with her it would explain a lot. But, no, what I mean is, she Rachel Rachel switched from being a radical to traditional a few years back. Now she has pancreatic cancer. She says she can't die in peace until the carvings are returned to the tribe. That's why I can't waste time with Tomlinson's touchy-feely bullshit. You have to find the artifacts before your aunt dies, I said. Rather than add But she'll die anyway, I swiveled around in my chair, done with the computer. Find anything? Enough, I said. A few years back, a complete mastodon tusk was stolen from a private collection. No photos, but it had primitive carving on it, a sort of lacework thatching. The thing was insured for half a million. Also a flint spearpoint orange plains chert, they call it supposedly worth ten thousand. You're right, nothing currently for sale on the Internet. I had no idea that kind of money was involved. Fossilized ivory, Fallsdown said. Is that the tusk they found in the Suwannee River? I heard it was a yard long and weighed fifty pounds. Paleo man the early Skins used ivory for weapons, but also as totems. That makes it a lot more valuable. Because it was worked, I said, but was guessing. Not only that, Ivory used by the Paleo Indians holds up better. I don't know why, but I'd take the time to find out if I lived here. Some believe there's an Ice Age graveyard where mastodons went to die. Mammoths, too, probably, but I'm not sure. Wouldn't that be something to find? I said, In Florida? The legend about elephant graveyards originated in Africa, not Florida, and it had been debunked long ago. Fallsdown gestured to indicate he kept an open mind. I said what I had been thinking: Are you sure you're not here to sell something? Or do some collecting on your own? Fallsdown remained unruffled. I might. Depends on how it goes tonight. I'm supposed to do that sweat lodge for the wife and daughters of a family in the phosphate business. They might know the names of serious collectors, because collectors drive the phosphate companies nuts, begging permission to hunt, trespassing. These women, or whoever runs the business, might have access to a list. I said, And you just happened to remember your good ol' hippie buddy from the Sedona days. My tone was cool enough to be an accusation. Fallsdown took it calmly, even smiled. Don't worry. I know all about that pond owned by a friend of yours, and the arrowheads, pottery, and other

stuff you found in a cave. Tomlinson even offered to take me diving there, but no thanks, man. Find the two pieces I'm after, I'm outta here. For Tomlinson who had nearly died in that pond to risk another dive said a lot about the respect he had for a man I had just insulted. I said, Sorry. It's a bad habit of mine, thinking when I should be listening. It's just that you know a lot about the relics trade for someone who's not an investigator or a tribal cop. Fallsdown was pleased, not offended. See? You're a man who uses his head. That's what I was hoping. Why not tag along with Tomlinson and me, at least tonight? Might be good for you. I asked, How? Well . . . I'll just come out and say it. I heard you got dumped by your girlfriend, and it might get your mind off things. The women are damn good-looking twin sisters and a blonde their step-mother, I guess. Used to be a big-time fashion model according to Tomlinson. We're taking a water taxi to a private island they own north of here. As he spoke, my dog banged the door open with his nose . . . trotted toward Fallsdown, gave his hand a sniff . . . did the same to me . . . then spun a few circles in the corner before collapsing on the floor. He's not what you'd call an affectionate animal, is he? Fallsdown remarked, but sounded impressed. What's his name? Instead of answering, I replied, Tomlinson has a big mouth. I wasn't dumped in fact, I had dinner with the woman he was talking about last night. Oh. Then you are still dating. Umm . . . not exactly, I said, but it was a mutual decision. We're still good friends. Mutual, huh? He smiled, amused by the lie. Then invite her along. You'll understand why I need a buffer when you hear the whole story. If I want to sweat, I'll wait til this rains stops and go stand in the parking lot, I told him. Fallsdown's faith in me had been validated. Perfect, he said. You can help me calm down Tomlinson after he finds out what I really have planned.

Revue de presse Praise for Bone Deep Doc Ford is back for his twenty-first appearance, and it's right to say that he's as good as he ever was . . . With hidden treasures galore, secret agent Doc Ford retains his cover of marine biologist very well, while tracking down some truly crooked relic hunters! Suspense Magazine White keeps the action churning forward as Doc encounters both human and animal foes, but the real interest here is the archaeological backdrop. Masterfully seeding the plot with information on Florida's ancient natural history and its contemporary environmental challenges White delivers a novel that perfectly blends story and landscape. We often say that fine nonfiction has the narrative drive of a good thriller, but we rarely have occasion to say that a fine thriller has all the mind-boggling fascination of compelling nonfiction. Booklist (starred review) A descent into the world of overzealous and unethical fossil collectors leads to a boat-napping, stolen artifacts, and increasingly dire threats . . . White does a fine job detailing Florida's unique history and geography. Publishers Weekly Praise for Night Moves White weaves in and out of two mysteries, telling the story with the same tight, vivid prose his fans have come to expect. Another strong addition to one of crime fiction's most consistent series. Associated Press Randy Wayne White takes one of Florida's most iconic mysteries and turns it into a tailor-made story for his own icon, Doc Ford. Night Moves illustrates why, after twenty novels, Ford's double life and White's attention to the Florida scenery continue to intrigue readers. South Florida Sun-Sentinel