



Four Fires

Bryce Courtenay

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In a small town like any other small town around Australia live the Maloneys. They are a fifth-generation Australian family of Irish Catholic descent who are struggling to reach the first run of the social ladder. The Maloneys are a family you won't forget: a strong mother, a father broken by war, three boys and two girls, one of whom has an illegitimate daughter. Each of their lives is changed forever by the four fires – passion, religion, warfare and fire itself.

Four Fire is unashamedly a story of the power of love and the triumph of the human spirit against the odds.

Four Fires Details

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Author : Bryce Courtenay

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From Reader Review Four Fires for online ebook

Debby says

I've downloaded the unabridged audible version of almost all of Bryce Courtenay's books. The primary reason is that Humphrey Bower is one of my favorite audible book narrators. He makes a story come alive with his uncanny ability to change accents, and even makes me believe I'm hearing a woman's voice. As for the story-- this one is very epic. I had just finished listening to "Jessica" which is one of the saddest stories I've heard in a long time. With this book, I found the Maloney family to be fascinating. Nancy, as the feisty mom, is a woman I grew to admire as she fought to make sure her kids were given every opportunity to make something grand of their lives. She wanted them to have a better life than she did. Rough as she was, around the edges, I admired her devotion to her children. I've noticed a repeating theme, with the author's books-- the Christian characters are often portrayed as hypocrites, and misguided in what Christianity is all about. I notice this, because I'm a Christian. I won't get into my religious beliefs/views, except to say that not all Christians are hypocrites. So, it saddens me to see a rather unfavorable view of Christians...though, I have no doubt there are plenty of evil people who go to church. Moving on... I'm a bit of a girly-girl, so I have a tough time reading about war and torture and gore. So, when Tommy finally reveals the story of his time as a prisoner (and this is not a spoiler, because you know it's coming), I found his story to be like a train wreck. I wanted to look away) albeit, fast forward. Yet, I listened to it. It's heart-breaking, to be reminded about prisoners of war, and the suffering they endured. Yet. we need to be reminded. I'm sad that Bryce Courtenay has passed away, and there will be no more of his books to read/listen to. I've never been to Australia, so his stories are my armchair to traveling the world. Well done, Mr. Courtenay. Thank you.

Steve says

This book was a complete slog to get through -- but only due to the length and the level of detail of that everything is described in. The story is incredibly disjointed at times, moving back and forth until you don't know which way is up, and then the chapter ends and you have to start again. There weren't many plot twists, some that I saw coming, and others that I didn't. I did really enjoy this book, the "climax" of the book left me entirely speechless, and the resolution and ending left me completely gobsmacked.

Lynn says

Bryce Courtenay has never disappointed me. His novels are the kind that you simply cannot put down. Thankfully, at the end of the first book in a series, you just know that he will follow it up with a sequel - he simply can't leave us hanging there! I am on a mission to read every single one of his book and I've made a pretty good dent in it. I started with The Potato Factory, which is a very good place to start. I was completely engrossed in it and when finished, I could not get my hands on enough of the authors books. The Potato Factory gives the reader an in depth view of the emigrants that settled in Australia - how Australia was formed, molded and fought over bit by bit. With each book about Australia, Bryce Courtenay teaches so many things about Australia from the customs to the ecological environment to politics and from the haves and the have nots. Each novel is comprised of stories within stories within stories. You must read some of these books for yourselves and see what you think - as you can see, I cannot say enough about them.

Janine says

I loved this audiobook. Great characters, each with their own sub plot. Takes place in Australia. Incredible reader.

Tom says

A grand, sweeping novel about the Maloneys, an Irish Catholic family living in the bush in Southeastern Australia. It picks up in the mid-1950s and takes us through the 1990s, but its span of characters also includes "Mr. Baloney", who served in WW I and his son Tommy's horrific experience as a POW in the Pacific Theatre in WW II. The tale is skillfully narrated by "Mole" Maloney, one of the five children of iron-willed Nancy who in so many ways reminded me of my mother's family of three very different brothers book-ended by strong sisters on either end. It's a great study of mid-century life and culture in Australia and the dialect, and the audiobook is beautifully narrated. It's a story about a family that rises from the garbage heap (literally and figuratively) through sheer force of will, pride, strong work ethic, persistence and hope. Through the stories of the family members Courtenay addresses themes such as torture in war, gender discrimination, multi-generational post-traumatic stress disorder, unjust social hierarchies, religious discrimination, and the lasting impact of the holocaust on its survivors. It's long, but I really hated for it to end. I would have given it five stars but for the almost too-lengthy retelling of Tommy's war experience and slightly contrived epilogue which wraps up things pretty neatly - but then concludes in the last sentence or two with a cool twist that rewards readers for their patience.

C. says

When I first read this, I would have given it five stars. It's another of Bryce Courtenay's carbon-copy exercises in sentimentality. This particular story traces the life of one family (he does enjoy the family dynasty trope, doesn't he?) through the eyes of, I think, Mitch. One family member ends up a boxer, one a successful fashion designer, one founds a business empire based on garbage-collection trucks. The only one who comes to relatively nothing is Mitch, who does nothing but fight valiantly during, I think, WWII. He rises modestly through the ranks, is psychologically scarred, falls in love with some girl, and possibly sings stirring songs in Vietnamese, though that might be a different Courtenay book.

It is implied that Mitch's life is at least as valid as that of the others, for he lived it with courage and integrity. Nothing wrong with that message, but I do wish he could express it in tones a little less maudlin and a little more original.

Sami D. says

Before reading this book, I consulted the reviews on Amazon.ca to get an idea of what it was about. Most said that this was just a story about an Irish Catholic family who began by being the social pariah of a small Australian town called Yankallie to prominence. However, I disagree. It is more than that.

Mole, the main protagonist of the story, recounts the Malony's rise from bottom of the social ladder to a prominent and respected family in Australia. Speaking from a first person's perspective, Mole recounts how each of his sibblings strive to achieve great success. He also incorporates the Maloney's extended family and describe how they have also achieved great strides in their own right.

Social issues such as PTSD, bigotry and ignorance are the main themes throughout the novel. You also learn about just how important Australia involvement was during the second world war as well as the subsequent cover up of the events that transpired in Sandakan as a war camp at the hands of the Japanese are of very interesting knowledge.

If you are one that loves historical fiction, this is the novel for you. I absolutely adored this novel. It was the first Bryce Courtney novel I have read from cover to cover. I am very excited to read more of his work. He just knows how to tell a good story.

Kathleen Hagen says

Four Fires, by Bryce Courtenay, Narrated by Humphrey Bowers, Produced by Bolinda Publishing, downloaded from audible.com.

This is a three-generation family narrative covering 100 years, in Australian history, the majority of the narrative taking place from 1956 to about 1964. Nancy Maloney is the mother of all five children in this narrative, but three of them are by different fathers. Her own husband fathered two, but only one in wedlock, so there's only one legitimate Maloney. Tommy Maloney, the father was a POW in WW II in Borneo and suffered untold cruelty by his Japanese captors but never told anyone about it until the end of his life. He came back from the war damaged, and spent many years as a drunk and a thief. But Nancy was determined that the five children would turn out well and bring the Maloney name up in the world. Sarah, the oldest, unfortunately became pregnant in highschool, but this did not stop her seeking to become one of the first Australian female doctors. Mike had the ambition to become a top fashion designer. Bozo was first a boxer who achieved Olympic status, and then became a very good businessman involving the transportation of goods, Mole, (the narrator of the story) was closest to his step-father, Tommy, learned his skills in the bush and tracking fires, and followed his lead into the army putting himself there just in time to go to Vietnam with predictable results. Little Colene was younger than the rest and was just coming into her own. The Maloneys were scrappers and lifted themselves out of the bottom rung of the town where Tommy and his father before him, had put the Maloney family. This is a brilliant narrative and when it's over, you're sorry to say goodbye to the Maloney family. Humphrey Bower does his usual wonderful job of narration.

Marietjie Steyn says

Dis altyd wonderlik om 'n Bryce Courtenay te lees. Laaang boek, maar baie mooi. Ek sou nog 'n duisend van hierdie bladsye kon lees.

Annie Oosterwyk says

I can't help myself, I love everything by Courtenay. This story was as rich as *The Potato Factory*, but not at all redundant. The Maloney family saga details every member and each is worthy of their own TV show. Courtenay writes as if they are each his main character and they are all so different! I really can't say enough about this author. I have just downloaded another by him and can't wait to listen.

Susan says

I *loved* this book! Admittedly, I listened to it, and the reader, Humphrey Bower, is more an actor than a reader. He made the book come alive as he adopted the tones and accents of men and women, boys and girls, all with their accented English (Yiddish, German, Japanese, Indian, Irish, Australian...). This is a story of a wildly unusual Australian family surviving by intelligence and drive and endless courage. A great read/listen! I was sorry to have it end.

Robert Delikat says

I believe that *Four Fires* by Bryce Courtenay is a phenomenal book all by itself. It is not, however, a book I probably would have gravitated to nor enjoyed as much in paper form. I picked this selection based on reviews and particularly the reference in Audible reviews to the narrator Humphrey Bower. I was not disappointed. To call Mr. Bower a narrator does not do him justice. An actor? Okay, that works. He flawlessly plays the roles of so many of the characters in this book. And that would make him an artist. That's good too. But, like the author himself, Bower is a Storyteller extraordinaire and for me, that was the magic of this selection.

I was blown away by every aspect of this book in a "good way" until Mole's dad takes him into the bush and tells him of his time in the war. For me, at that moment, it was like getting hit in the solar plexus. The book abruptly became something entirely different. It was like it was not even the same book written by the same person. And, while I concluded that the descriptions of all the brutality of war could be taken in context, it might not be for everyone. I mean this is no holds barred brutal descriptions of war-crimes. And, these events are not pure fiction, but, we are told, are descriptions based on historical facts and perhaps we should not avoid nor look away from such things if we are to diminish their chance of reoccurrence in the future.

But, those reservations aside, for the record, I give the *Four Fires*:

5 stars for personal enjoyment
5 stars for general skill in writing
5 stars for storytelling, acting and narration.

Malia says

This is only my second book by Bryce Courtenay, but already he is establishing himself as one of my favourite writers. Though *FOUR FIRES* and *THE POWER OF ONE* (the books I have read thus far) are

rather lengthy, they truly resonate and the characters Courtenay creates in both feel so real I miss them when I finish.

The story centers around the Maloney family in a small town in Australia. They don't have it easy, and are definitely a multi-faceted bunch, but they make the best of what they have and just feel like a real family. Courtenay's books remind me so strongly of Gerald Durrell's MY FAMILY AND OTHER ANIMALS. The people are quirky and sometimes downright odd, but they all have some sort of charm that makes you root for them.

In any case, FOUR FIRES deals with so many issues that feel too important to forget in terms of historical value, while still remaining incredibly relevant today. Courtenay is an author who takes his time getting to the crux of the matter, but the journey of arriving is better than the 'prize'. His books are so intrinsically about character development, you really feel as though you are following this group of people as they live their lives, go through ups and downs. That is my favourite kind of book. If I can feel for the characters or grow interested in their stories, there doesn't need to be any huge plot related drama. Still, for those readers who need adventure, there's that, too.

Courtenay writes about the difficulties of living in the Australian Bush, of Australia's World War II involvement and PTSD; of making it in the world of business and finding a sense of fulfillment along the way. There is romance and humor, tragedy and adventure. I really don't understand why Courtenay is not better known in Europe and the US, because he easily holds his own in comparison to other writers of epic tomes such as the much-lauded Ken Follett (nothing against Follett...)

There I go rambling on and on, but that's just what this kind of book does. It creeps under your skin in the best way possible, so that you feel a part of the story and it is an almost sad event when you finally finish it. I listened to the audio version of this, mainly because I saw that the brilliant Humphrey Bower narrates, and it is absolutely worth it. He is one of the best narrators I have come across.

Can't wait to read some of Courtenay's other books. Much as with THE POWER OF ONE, I wish he was alive so I could write him how much I loved this book. Highly recommended!

Find more reviews and bookish fun at <http://www.princessandpen.com>

Gil Bradshaw says

The best way to do a Bryce Courtenay is via audiobook with Humphrey Bowers narrating. It turns the book into an unforgettable experience. Bowers is such a great actor that he makes the characters come alive. Courtenay is such a great storyteller that their combination is fantastic.

This book isn't as dark as The Power of One and Tandia. It has less swearing and isn't so violent. However, it's a great book that focuses on Australia by focusing on a large family in the bush. Courtenay develops characters very well and takes each child through their own story. Bowers masterfully develops voices for each of them, including the recent Jewish immigrants and East Indian immigrants.

Courtenay focuses on social issues such as abortion, women's rights, and PTSD.

This was a great book with very colorful characters.

Sue says

What a story! This was my first audiobook and Humphrey Bower's narration made it a real treat. Some of the war stuff was tough to get through, though. I generally avoid war stories, but this had a lot of family saga stuff mingled in. In fact, the war stuff doesn't really come in until the second half of the book. Overall, a worthwhile read that kept me entertained while I logged around 60 miles walking round and round my backyard.
