

## A CONVERSATION WITH RICHARD A. THOMPSON

### What inspired you to write *Big Wheat*?

You no longer have to be all that old to have seen the passing of not one but several eras. With some, it is goodbye and good riddance, but I am truly sad to see some gone. I have always been fascinated by the threshing era, which survived at least forty years past the time when newer technology actually made it unnecessary. It was a special, even magical time in American history, and at some point, it seemed a shame to me that nobody had ever written a good novel about it.

### How long did it take you to write your award-winning book?

That's a trick question. The first draft was actually done in 30 days, as the subject of a National Novel Writing Month, in November of 2006. It was only 50,000 words long then, and definitely not ready for prime time. I put it aside and went back to work on my Saint Paul bail bondsman series.

Then, in 2009, my editor and I couldn't agree on the plot of the next novel in the series, so I picked up *Big Wheat* again and seriously set about making it 50 percent longer and a whole lot more serious. I spent a little less than a year on the expansion and rewrite. My editor accepted

it in spring 2010, and it went to press in January of the following year.

### What do you like most about *Big Wheat*?

There are so many things going on—a serial killer story, a love story, a coming-of-age story, the struggle between good and evil, the high road to the Dust Bowl—that it's hard to pick. I think what I most enjoyed doing was the atmosphere.

### What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I always envy the people who say they knew at an early age that they wanted to be an author. I did not. At various times I aspired to being an animated cartoonist, a comic book artist, and a sculptor. I read a lot of novels to try to find out how the world worked and what people were all about, which led me to believe that writers were a lot smarter than I was. I also suspected that a lot of them had rich patrons. Not me, in other words.

Ultimately, in the interest of making a living at something I seemed to be very good at, I became a civil engineer and a building code official and spent 45 years in heavy construction. Before that time was over, in 1995 I picked up a copy of Julia Cameron's fine book, *The Artist's Way*. It would

be a gross understatement to say that it changed my life. Soon I was taking classes and going to writers' conferences and submitting short stories to magazines, and I wrote a 500-plus page, never-published novel set in the construction industry, called "Carpenter Gothic."

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### How do you most enjoy spending time when you are not writing?

Now that my wife and I are both retired from our "day jobs," we spend a lot of time traveling to places we never thought we would ever go, like Europe and England, and recently, Egypt. The notebook and/or laptop goes along, of course.

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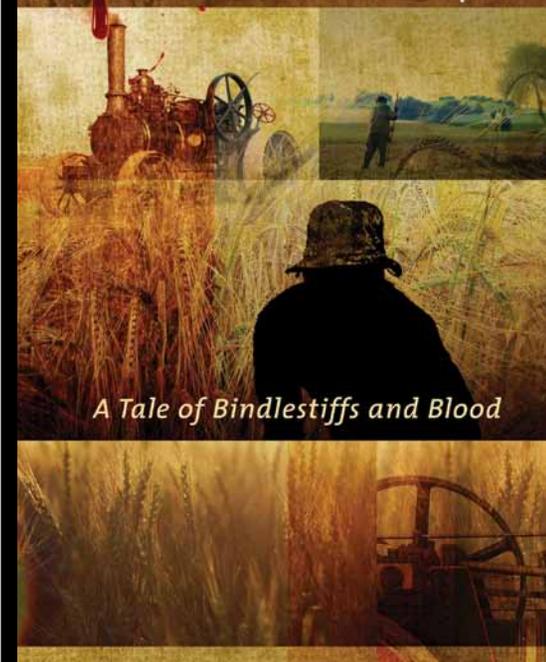
# MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

## Genre Fiction Winner

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# Big Wheat

Richard A. Thompson



**Big Wheat**  
by Richard A. Thompson

POISONED PEN PRESS

# Big Wheat

## SUMMARY

The summer of 1919 has come to a close, and men, women and machines are moving across the land, bringing in the wheat harvest. Jilted by his childhood sweetheart and estranged from his drunkard father, Charlie Krueger leaves home to seek employment in North Dakota's booming wheat threshing industry. There, he witnesses the notorious Windmill Man serial killer committing the most recent in a string of murders, and becomes a target himself.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What role did the year and setting play in creating the tone of the book and your experience in reading it?
3. What have been the biggest changes in farming since 1919? Would the telling of *Big Wheat* work in a modern-day farm setting?
4. Did you experience *Big Wheat* as being more a book about a serial killer, a love story, or coming-of-age novel?
5. How would you describe Charlie, and what changes do you see in him over the course of the book?
6. Are you surprised by Charlie's attraction to Emily? In what ways are they different, and how are they alike? What do you predict their future to be?
7. Where do you think the bindlestiffs went in the winter?
8. The book jacket says that this is a stand-alone mystery. Do you see the opportunity for a sequel, and if so, what might that story look like?



9. In what ways does *Big Wheat* remind you of other books you have read?
10. What techniques make a really good mystery, and to what extent are they used in *Big Wheat*?

## ABOUT RICHARD A. THOMPSON



*Richard A. Thompson is a civil engineer who traded his transit for a laptop and now writes mysteries full time. His first book, Fiddle Game, was short-listed for a Debut Dagger Award. The second in the series about bail bondsman and former bookie Herman Jackson, Frag Box, was a Minnesota Book Award finalist.*

**Learn more about the author and his work at [www.fiddlegame.com](http://www.fiddlegame.com).**



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# 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS