



El Paso

Winston Groom

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Three decades after the first publication of *Forrest Gump*, Winston Groom returns to fiction with this sweeping American epic.

Long fascinated with the Mexican Revolution and the vicious border wars of the early twentieth century, Winston Groom brings to life a much-forgotten period of history in this sprawling saga of heroism, injustice, and love. *El Paso* pits the legendary Pancho Villa against a thrill-seeking railroad tycoon known only as the Colonel—whose fading fortune is tied up in a colossal ranch in Chihuahua, Mexico. But when Villa kidnaps the Colonel’s grandchildren and absconds into the Sierra Madre, the aging New England patriarch and his son head to El Paso, hoping to find a group of cowboys brave enough to hunt down the Generalissimo. Replete with gunfights, daring escapes, and an unforgettable bullfight, *El Paso* becomes an indelible portrait of the American Southwest in the waning days of the frontier, one that is “sure to entertain” (*Jackson Clarion-Ledger*).

El Paso Details

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Author : Winston Groom

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Westerns, Literary Fiction

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From Reader Review El Paso for online ebook

Malcolm says

I won this book in a giveaway and I want to thank Goodreads, the sponsor and the author.

I often think that there is a hole in our American history, or at least in my knowledge of it. It seems that history books, literature, movies and other media skip over the twenty or thirty years spanning the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first fifteen years of the twentieth. It's like everything slowed down after that gunfight in Tombstone and didn't pick up again until World War I.

Yet this was a time when the country was coming of age. The survival of the Union was assured, the continent had been settled all the way to the Pacific, there were forty-eight stars on the flag, and the US was becoming a player on the world stage. It was a time of transition, the blending of the fading old with the emerging new.

With this book, Winston Groom has gone a long way to provide us with the sense and "feel" of this often overlooked period in history. With well crafted, easily readable prose, he spins a western yarn of the "good guys pursuing the bad guys", while at the same time, in episodic fashion, alludes to many of the historical events of the era.

John Shaughnessy, known as the Colonel, has built a railroad empire. As he has grown older, he has passed much of the management of the business along to his adopted son, Arthur. Like many of their contemporaries, the Shaughnessys also own and operate a large cattle ranch in central Mexico. With the Mexican Revolution raging around them, the American owned ranches have enjoyed a "hands-off" approach from the revolutionaries.

That changes when the forces of Pancho Villa kidnap Arthur's daughter and son, the Colonel's grandchildren. With no help coming from the US government, the Colonel and Arthur mount their own rescue mission with a small band of daring cowboys. As they pursue Villa into the Sierra Madre, we meet a host of characters, some historical, others imagined.

A rip-roaring, hell-bent for leather tale set in an exciting time in America's history. Don't let this one pass you by.

The Pfaeffle Journal (Diane) says

I have to say I love the cover for this book. It really draws you in, I could hardly wait to listen to this book. Expecting the second coming of Edna Ferber's *Giant* I settled in for a good listen.

Take a fading railroad tycoon from Boston, an adopted son trying to hold together his fathers railroad, two small children and Mexican Revolutionary and you have the makings for *El Paso*. I have to say it is a great story line, rich gringos with their multi million acre ranches with hundreds of thousands head of cattle and one desperado out to prove to the world just how notorious he is should make a great read. I just couldn't take the book seriously, there wasn't the depth needed to make this a serious work of historical fiction. Simply put the characters lacked depth, and that detracted from the story.

This review was originally posted on The Pfaeffle Journal

Cathrine ?? says

Muchas gracias to NetGalley and Liveright for the opportunity to read this ARC.

4.5★

A rootin'-tootin' sprawling Southwestern yarn with all the excess, overindulgence, and satisfaction of a Thanksgiving dinner. There are guns, yachts, planes, trains, cowboys and Indians, hangings, kidnappings, bull fights, lost gold mines, gila monsters, rattlesnakes, jaguars, and bears, Oh My! It's a story set against the backdrop of rich American imperialism south of the border, the Mexican Revolution, and the exploits of the infamous Pancho Villa. Almost 100 years later and that border is still a contentious issue.

We're talking H—U—G—E ??

As the author states, this is not a "historical novel" but with his talent for combining fact and fiction in storytelling (he penned *Forrest Gump*) it is generously peppered with true persons and events which add flavor and spice to this fictional tale about a kidnapping and desperado manhunt through the Sierra Madre. It is brutal, cruel, and violent at times, and it all works. My one complaint is the page count (well, also the bull fight—I loathe bullfighting). I prefer my books a bit shorter these days but it was never boring and always entertaining. What initially attracted me was the cover. My dad was born in El Paso in 1920 during the time period and one of his favorite songs was Marty Robbins's El Paso so I took a chance and requested it. Adventures In Reading 101. My dad would have liked this as much as I did.

Extras

For listening pleasure here is a link to Marty Robbin's classic song with the great Grady Martin on guitar. Back in the day (would you just listen to me) the radio would only play songs that lasted 2 minutes so it was edited. This is the unabridged, true book lovers version. You gotta love a song that tells a story and sets the perfect mood for a book. It was also used in the season finale of Breaking Bad.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UVVS...>

I had no idea there was actual film footage of Pancho Villa. In this one the viewer witnesses an execution. Did someone actually film that?!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g58zP...>

roark says

A decent yarn, but my expectations were higher. Mr. Groom claims the book is not a historical novel and I suppose it does fall short of actually being one. Given the classic saga of *Forrest Gump* and his previous background in non-fiction history, it would have served us better if it was one. Michneresque with a little graphic (though not gratuitous) violence tossed in.

A simple plot: Arthur, the protagonist, is an orphan who is adopted into the family of a wealthy railroad magnate around the turn of the century. This quickly zooms up to find him running a declining company

because his adopted father is busy enjoying his wealth. This causes him to ignore his own family which brings all the usual problems that entails. The company desperately needs a cash infusion and Arthur's father believes his holdings in Mexico may provide the solution. So he packs up two entire families and his household staff and off they go. Then things get interesting: Pancho Villa and his army are marauding the border with the goal of reclaiming all the land for the peasants that was taken by wealthy Americans and Mexicans. Villa kills, kidnaps, and steals, so, naturally, he must be hunted down. Here, a number of new characters are introduced and their respective quests diverge and then come back together nicely. There is very little about El Paso in this book.

Mary says

Winston Groom's latest novel, El Paso, has all the action and imagery that you expect from a good western: a cattle drive, a road trip race via airplane and train, cold-blooded murders, tense battlefield exploits, multiple kidnappings, complete with villains and heroes. Set against the backdrop of the Mexican Revolution, Groom's handful of historical figures populate El Paso: Pancho Villa, President Wilson, Tom Mix, Ambrose Bierce, and Generals Pershing and Patton. Recommended for those who enjoy rip-roaring adventure.

David Schroeder says

What a wild ride! The old west meets the 20th century in Mexico. El Paso is a thrilling novel with outstanding storytelling by Winston Groom and I couldn't put it down. It does not release until October 2016 but I was able to read an advance copy I received at BEA. Pick up a copy this fall.

Kim McGee says

Epic that follows such a diverse group of characters into the hot dry Southwest where the great General Pancho Villa is dragging his ragtag army waging war against everyone- the Mexican Army and the Americans who get in his way. He was personified by journalists and early movie reels as being a brave General passionately leading his army against huge odds but what we learn here is his other darker side - the rage and uncontrollable violence sometimes without reason. During the late 1800's many East coast American barons held considerable land and mining rights in Mexico and throughout Texas and it is one family whose ill timed trip will result in having children kidnapped ,others killed and a manhunt chasing Pancho Villa through desert and mountains in heat and hailstorms. The violence of the landscape many times matched the people who lived there and fought to survive. Famous characters are sprinkled in to help illustrate the diversity - the Hollywood cowboy Tom Mix, Generals Pershing and Patton and there is name dropping of all the founding fathers of the Industrial Revolution who started our thirst for oil and coal. The easy going style found in Winston Groom's other book "Forrest Gump" is used here to help soften the violence and add little touches of innocence. It is an epic worthy of James Michener or Larry McMurtry. My thanks to the publisher for the advance copy.

Thomas Todd says

A railroad baron along with his adopted son and their families travel to Mexico to save their cattle herd worth millions of dollars from being a causality in the Revolution being led by Pancho Villa. Great historical fiction read that encompasses the early railroad industry, cattle industry and even aeroplanes. Lots of colorful characters which are easy to follow as the character development isn't overdone. Written by the author of Forrest Gump this story takes place on the border of US and Mexico at El Paso, hence the title. I enjoyed this book.

Ruby says

I really enjoyed this book, having never read anything by this author. The writing felt very episodic and similar to Cervantes' Don Quixote. It's curious to note that I felt some of the violent scenes were written somewhat softly which almost made the idea of the brutality worse? The pace picked up toward the end and I'm glad he includes an epilogue to neatly tie things up.

Michelle Lancaster says

WESTERN HISTORICAL FICTION

Winston Groom

El Paso: A Novel

Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company

Hardcover, 978-1-6314-9224-2 (also available as an ebook and on Audible), 496 pgs., \$27.95

October 4, 2016

In 1916, Arthur Shaughnessy is a vice president and general manager of New England & Pacific Railroad Company, which was won by his father, "Colonel" Shaughnessy, in a card game. The railroad is in financial trouble due to the Colonel's profligate ways. The Colonel appreciates the finer things: yachts, summer houses, his cattle ranch in the northern Mexico state of Chihuahua.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Pancho Villa is poaching cattle to feed his Great Northern Army in furtherance of the Mexican Revolution of 1916. The Colonel decides to drive his cattle herd from the ranch in Mexico to El Paso, both to save the valuable herd from Villa and to sell the cattle at auction to meet the railroad's payroll. Disaster ensues when the Colonel takes the whole family along and his grandchildren are kidnapped for ransom by an equally cash-strapped Villa.

Borrowing from Dickens and Little Orphan Annie, Groom plucks Arthur from an orphanage in Boston, sending him to live with the Colonel and his wife. Arthur's new life is privileged and he is loved and supported by his new family, even if the Colonel never quite thinks Arthur manly enough for the Teddy Roosevelt stereotype he most admires. This generational struggle is the cause of questionable decisions when Arthur and the Colonel set out into the Sierra Madre to rescue the children from Villa.

El Paso: A Novel is the first work of fiction from Winston Groom in almost twenty years. Groom is the author of Forrest Gump, and so El Paso has been eagerly awaited. Like Forrest Gump, the stories of the fictional characters of El Paso unfold against the backdrop of history, interacting with historical characters.

Unlike Forrest Gump, the technique is not as successful in El Paso.

As in Forrest Gump, El Paso is filled with dark themes: war, revolution, psychological and physical abuse. The two novels also share a sense of humor. It is this humor that falls flat in El Paso. The character of Gump, many times unintentionally funny, is so good-hearted and sincere that the humor is front and center without being forced. No such character exists in El Paso, leaving the humor to the third-person narrator, which results in cognitive dissonance against the dark backdrop.

Groom claims El Paso is not a historical novel, but it fits the definition of such. It is a skillful weaving of history, historical personalities (Tom Mix, Ambrose Bierce, and Mabel Dodge among them), folk tales, and fictional characters into a single narrative. Unfortunately, El Paso meanders, Groom taking off on twisting rabbit trails which fail to further the plot or shed light on the characters. While certain of these trails prove entertaining, El Paso is a hundred pages too long and suffers from an identity crisis, testing the patience of this enthusiastic reader. Oligarchs and Marxists converging on El Paso is a promising construct, but El Paso is self-indulgent and doesn't know whether it's a farce or merely comedy.

Originally published in Lone Star Literary Life.

Joyce says

Always glad to find a Western, and this sprawling, expansive tale fits the bill for the early 20th century template. RR tycoon John Shaughnessy, in severe financial straits, heads for Mexico with his family and entourage, to sell cattle from his northern Mexico ranch rather than mortgaging his yacht for ready cash, as his adopted son Arthur proposed. However, Pancho Villa has other plans for the cattle and indeed the tycoon's spread. He arrives while the men are out, kills and wounds staff, and kidnaps Shaughnessy's grandchildren. There's no choice now but to form a search party and get the kids back. The book starts rather slowly with Arthur's adoption and coming of age in the midst of plenty rather than the orphanage, but the action picks up once we're in Mexico and builds in intensity; real people--Pancho Villa, Ambrose Bierce, Tom Mix among them--mix with fictional, all authentically drawn; the story line is action-oriented with gunplay, a bullfight, raids, and battles, and it's cinematic and violent; interesting background in Mexico during the Revolution; language is vivid and colorful; and the tone is at times amusing, heart wrenching, and brutal. In an afterward Groom talks about turning history into fiction; he makes no claims to accuracy of details but clearly the story is well-researched and rich in historical and biographical detail.

Mr. Gottshalk says

On the front of this book, which I borrowed from my local library, there is a sticker that says, "If you liked Lonesome Dove by Larry McMurtry" you'll like this one. The cover is terrific, by the way - the best I've seen in a while. This is no Pulitzer Prize winner. This is a fun, rambling, adventurous, colorful portrait of a piece of history I need to know more about - the Mexican Revolution and Pancho Villa. The story is set up well - a wealthy railroad owner (the Colonel) seeks to reclaim his livestock from Mexican revolutionaries, led by the murderous Villa - by going down there with his family to take back what's his. The son, Arthur (an adopted orphan) races his father's train from Chicago by flying down to El Paso - a dangerous feat in itself a hundred years ago. That's just one adventure I liked and I could picture in my mind as I read. There are some gruesome parts as well, but I think the author wanted to keep it somewhat real. The chapters are fairly short,

and often bounce around from the perspectives of other characters, but they're all interesting! But to compare this to Lonesome Dove is simply not fair. That's perhaps one of my top 10 books!

Denise Walker says

Let me start by saying this is not a book I would normally pick up. Wow, what a crazy wild ride! Groom crafts an amazing story with bits of history that he twists to fit his vision (it works) which is epic in its scope. I was impressed with the magnitude of characters and their believability.

I was able to read this one thanks to Penguin Random House.

Chris Gager says

Picked this one up from the book swap shelves at my Subaru service place. The dealership Vice President(semi-retired) is a reader ... The book actually belongs to the Bath library so it'll be going back there when I'm done. Seems fine so far - an epic - but will have to be put to the back of the line for now as higher priority reads have moved ahead of it. Haven't read "Forrest Gump" yet.

Moving along ... I have to say that the author's prose is uninspiring, merely workmanlike. The story is a big adventure, so that helps. Was Pancho Villa really as nasty as he's portrayed here? Maybe ... I'm gonna check it out. Many authors(see Cormac McCarthy) and filmmakers have portrayed historic Northern Mexico as a fascinating place where regard for individual life is meager and murder and violence no big deal.

The beat goes on ... mundane writing in service to a reasonably interesting plot. The author has already dropped John Reed and Mabel Dodge into the action. They rescue Arthur from a plane semi-crash in the wilds of New Mexico. Not bloody likely! Then there's John and Ethel Barrymore ... just for yuks I guess. And now it's Ambrose Bierce and before that Tom Mix ... look out, here comes the kitchen sink. The cover flap photo of the author shows a friendly sort of chap wearing an ascot? a turtleneck? and fondling a drinkie poo. He sports an "I'm only in this for the money" grin on his face. The characters are mostly cardboard and the dialogue is stiff and unimaginative. But ... there is a plot going on and that should carry me through to the end(w/o much enthusiasm) I guess.

- The old man = Teddy Roosevelt ...

- Lots of draggy side tracks ...

- How can the crowd see details of falling bodies from "thousands of feet" away?

- Is a ouija board going to work on a train in the middle of nowhere?

- "exuberated"?????

- Woodrow Wilson turns up, George Patton will be coming along with General Pershing. OBVIOUSLY Mr. G. is not writing historical fiction. It's just fiction in a historical setting with a lot of cameos of questionably credibility.

- Bierce is described as some "old gringo" - the title of the movie in which he was played by Gregory Peck.
- Arthur digs up some conquistador relics - just like in "O Pioneers." This event is never referred to again, even though the reader is given to understand that this is an event of some significance.
- Physically, this story covers the same territory as "Blood Meridian" only 65 years later. "The Wild Bunch" was much closer in time to this story. Other connections ... "The Streets of Laredo" - "The Crossing" - "All the Pretty Horses" - That book by Robert Olen Butler I can't remember the title of.
- Whuh??? - "... who had left the table but wandered back into the room after hearing loud voices, thinking coffee might be served." So ... what's the connection between loud voices and coffee being served?

- I just looked up Tom Mix on wiki and based on his story there I can't see that he belongs in this story. Maybe Mr. Groom knows of some secret episode in Mix' life??? Looks like Mr. Mix was actually in Hollywood making movies the whole time this thing was taking place(1916). Weird ...

So, I just read a review of this in a Dallas newspaper. The reviewer seemed to think that WG had in mind some sort of pulp fiction tribute/farce mash-up. I haven't laughed a lot so far ... once, maybe?

Slowly meandering towards the finish line ... the Dan Brown comparison's popped into my head last night. Mostly, Mr. Groom is a better writer than Dan Brown and there are snippets of good writing. An impromptu bullfight(in the middle of the Sierra Madre mountains???) is well-described if highly unlikely. "Highly unlikely" is a phrase that might be applied to a dismally(spellcheck says that's not a word) large portion of this book. Meanwhile, the author unnecessarily prolongs the plot with pointless digressions. As the Dallas reviewer pointed out, this coulda shoulda been 100 pages(or more) shorter. More nasty notes ...

- How does Bomba know what's a poisonous frog in Northern Mexico? And, I must say, the presence of a black servant-dude named Bomba is a giveaway that this is not to be taken seriously. Does the author WANT it to be taken seriously? Seems like he can't make up his mind.
- Those Hollywood movie makers pop up again. Why and how are they still travelling with Villa?
- Henry O. Flipper(first Af-Am grad of West point) and Harriet Quimby(aviatrix) pop up, as do three wandering miners in search of gold in the Sierra Madres - an obvious reference to the Bogart-Huston movie classic.
- Obviously WG has read "Blood Meridian" - he has mules falling off a cliff, just like Cormac McCarthy. And a surprise Grizzly attack ... Probably no Grizzlies in N. Mexico in 1916. Probably ...
- A broken leg ... a bullfight! ... a gila monster bite ... a misprint ... Deming, not Deeming ... so far no rattlesnakes or scorpions, though.
- Arthur spots an eagle soaring thousands of feet away(hundreds, maybe) ...
- "Meanwhile, Timmy's spirits had improved immensely since he'd recovered from the gila monster bite." Well ... DUH! BTW, the gila monster episode was described in gruesome-loving detail. More time and space wasted.
- According to wiki, Tom Mix did NOT grow up in Arizona, as is stated in this book ... Pennsylvania.

Finished up last night with just a bit of skimming. If Goodreads had six stars to choose from this would be a perfect 3* book = below average, but with only five stars to choose from a three-star rating means that the book is decent, respectable etc. And this book is not up to that level. More like mediocre ... so I give it 2.5*, which rounds down to 2*. To sum up, we get the following as the endgame unwinds: more Cormac McCarthy(burying bodies in Mexico=The Crossing), a horrible death-by-rattlesnake, the gratuitous killing off in the Afterword of one of the stories appealing young characters(and a possible reference to the death of Mary White), more over-the-top violence and bloodshed, the return of the grimy old prospector(think Walter Huston in "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre"(the film is referred to in the Afterword), more of the youthful George Patton, more weird nonsense(perpetuating a false history) about Tom Mix in the Afterword, death-by-quicksand, seventy-one!!!! chapters, and this bit of triteness at the death(also gratuitous) of Cowboy Bob ...

"After all those days on the trail, he'd thought he might almost have found the big brother he'd always wanted, or the friend of a lifetime, but now that was gone forever as the sun went down over a cold Christmas Day." - UGH!!!

My suggestion to Mr. Groom is that in the future he either lay off writing fiction or lay off the bourbon when he writes. To his credit, however, the lowly scorpion is never brought onstage to bite anybody.

One more thing ... in this book John Reed witnesses the death of Ambrose Bierce(Villa murders him), though he doesn't realize it's Bierce because Bierce disguised himself a bit and was using the name "Jack Robinson." However ... seems like Reed would have put two and two together after the fact, since Bierce's fate was a well-known mystery of the time, and declared that Bierce had been killed by Villa. Reed WAS a journalist, after all.

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

Immediately upon starting this book I kept asking myself one question.

I loathed the book of Forrest Gump (calm down.. the movie was awesome) so I think I fell to that old trap of just loving a cover and not putting any other thoughts into why I'm reading a book..and ended up with this stinker.

I'll learn one day not to do that. Because this was a long- hard- boring -ass book. It's the story of mainly Arthur. He grew up in an orphanage until he somehow lucks up at the age of eight and is adopted by a rich couple and swept off his feet. He never dreamed of getting to lead the life of a railroad tycoon's son. That railroad tycoon likes to piss through money though and Arthur grows up to have mostly a job of keeping them out of the poorhouse. Not that they really even get close. But it's hinted at.

Arthur's father or the 'Colonel' ends up realizing his land in Mexico (that he bought dirt cheap) is under attack by Pancho Villa. His beef is being stolen and eaten and he is not going to stand for it. He loads up his wife and Arthur's family and they head into the unrest. Once there the Colonel decides to drive his cattle back to the US to keep them from ending up in the uprising's tummies. After he and Arthur leave..Pancho Villa comes to the ranch and takes Arthur's two children hostage.

So now there is an epic chase to get them back.

Save your time is what I say. There are many random characters through out the book that I couldn't give two craps about and none of the characters felt real. They all felt like cardboard cut-outs of what the book could have been.

There is lots of violence so I kept reading the stupid thing hoping it would all tie together and make some kind of sense. AND that's another thing..THIS STUPID THING IS LONG! If you are going to write a big old puppy squisher at least make me not get all ticked off about all the time I wasted reading this. EIGHT FRIGGING HOURS!

Then the icing on the cake was..I think the author just wove in political views that felt timely to try and make it more interesting. He didn't realize that if you are like me you are FREAKING TIRED of being beat over the head with politics. I'm almost aggravated with this stupid book enough to one star it. BECAUSE IT SUCKED!!

Now they will probably make a movie of it and make thousands of dollars. I'm not buying it. I'm sticking with the true western epic of all time. (and the best book ever for the two of you that haven't been book pushed into reading it yet)

Booksouce: Netgalley in exchange for review.