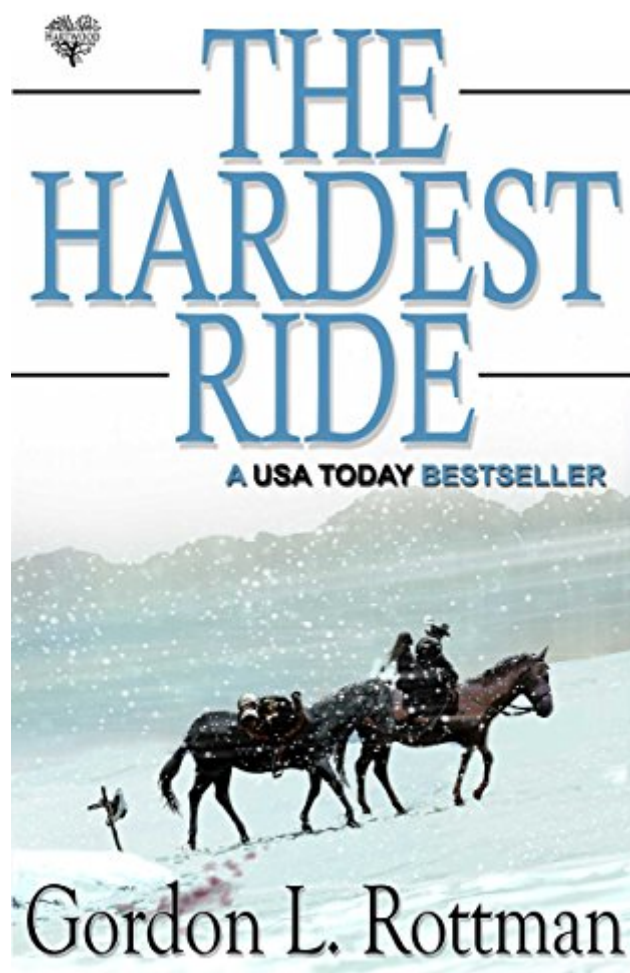


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The Hardest Ride



Synopsis

A USA TODAY and bestseller, this wonderfully crafted tale of 1800s Western life won the Western Fictioneers' Peacemaker Award for Best Western Novel 2014, was a Western Fictioneers Peacemaker Award Finalist for Best First Western Novel 2014, and was a Western Writers of America Spur Award Finalist for Best Traditional Western Novel for 2013. The Texas-Mexico border, the winter of 1886 "The Great Die Up. A raw rift separates Mexicans and Anglos. A loner cowpoke and a mute Mexican girl fight man and nature to reunite. Out of work cowpoke Bud Eugen comes across Marta, a mute sixteen-year old Mexican girl whose family has been killed by Indians. Bud reluctantly takes her along, even though he's never had to accommodate another person in his simple life. He's unable to find anyone willing to take her. In spite of his prejudices, Bud grows to like the spunky girl (and her excellent cooking). Eventually, they both find work on a border ranch. Here, the relationship between the girl and the young cowboy hesitantly grows. But banditos raid the ranch, kidnapping the rancher's daughters and Marta. Bud, with twelve other men, pursue the banditos into the most desolate reaches of Mexico. Ambushes and battles with banditos, Rurales, and traitors are constant, and the brutal weather is as much a threat as the man-made perils. Life and death choices are made at every turn as one side gains the advantage, then the other. The rancher's daughters are rescued, and the exhausted party turns back. But Bud presses on alone, against insurmountable odds "determined to fulfill an unspoken promise to Marta.

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Customer Reviews

In many ways this is an almost perfect Western. The qualifier is actually based on a philosophical position that nothing is exactly perfect, therefore there must be a flaw somewhere, though I cannot tell you what it is. The author calls it a Western Romance with a body count of about eighty, which is an accurate description. It's a fascinating mix. Bud Eugen is a good guy, ostensibly a typical "punch" as he abbreviates "cowpuncher". Actually he's a lot more than that, as he demonstrates in the course of this novel. He starts out looking for work, and on the way picks up a dumb (Can't talk, but far from stupid) Mexican girl whose entire family has been murdered. His plan is to take her to the nearest helpful Mexican, but, well, read it and find out. I'm not going to spoil one of the finest pleasures of this very pleasurable read. However as circumstances develop our hero and the young woman who is "not my woman" find themselves exchanging an amazing amount of lead with some most unsavory, but not incompetent characters. Okay, here's the deal, you're going to like Bud a lot. You're going to love Marta. And you're going to wonder how they make it, and ... Not going to spoil it. This is fun. Highest recommendation.

Things I loved most about this book: 1. It felt real - I'm sure it's because the author has experience on a working ranch in Mexico, but you could tell this was not just a glorified view of a historical period. This book really understands what cowboying in that part of the world is about, and it honors the kinds of determined people who can endure that life. The historical detail was also fantastic--never laid on too thick, but so well crafted that I came away feeling like I knew what it was like back then in the late nineteenth century. While the first person narrator's voice takes a little getting used to (he talks like ... well, like a cowboy), it also adds to the authenticity of the book. 2. A genuine female lead - Many westerns are guilty of making their women characters flat--they're plot devices. Or, they turn them into some kind of gun-toting male fantasy. Marta was neither, and I absolutely loved her. She WAS tough as nails, but she was also vulnerable and flawed, and really bossy (despite the fact that she's mute. And while we're on that topic, I was amazed by the way I almost forgot she was mute because her forceful personality was so vividly portrayed). 3. The relationships were developed - particularly the connection between Bud and Marta, but really all of

the relationships were compelling and believable. This isn't just a book about gun battles (although there is lots and lots and LOTS of shooting, and I've got several brand new gun vocab words), it's a book about people.

Let me say, I love westerns, and this book is one of the best I've read. I started this around 5pm and read straight through until after midnight! This story grabs you and won't let go. I thought the hero's voice so strong and certainly worthy of being in first person. Loved the slow buildup of the romance. No one who reads this can deny Rottman's knowledge of the times and customs and the land on both sides of the Rio Grande. It's exceptional, but never beats you over the head. It's flawlessly slipped into the story, and seen through the eyes of the young cowboy. This couple fights hard for each other and to be together, through some incredible odds. If this is Rottman's first foray into the western, I'm dying to read more of his work!

Judging from all the reviews I'm late to this party. But I'll add mine anyway. *The Hardest Ride* is the best western I've read since *Lonesome Dove*, and like *Lonesome Dove* it will become part of the American myth. If westerns were in fashion now it would soon be a film. It has everything: Bud, an unforgettable young cowboy, Marta, the toughest most attractive young woman in current fiction, Mexican bandits and Federales, rustlers, fierce Indians, a crooked rancher, cross border battles, and as per the title, the hardest ride. Through broken and trackless country, harsh weather, gunfights, nothing stops Bud in his way. Well, I won't spoil the story. *The Hardest Ride* even has descriptions of, and a recipe for, ranch frijoles that I plan to try this weekend. As a novel it transcends the genre, going beyond the standard conventions to tell a story that seems to be drawn from life as it was lived on the frontier in the late 19th Century. It's that good. The author clearly knows ranching, horses and cattle, the terrain, guns and gun fighting, and the history of the period. He also has a level of talent rarely experienced. His supporting characters are quickly drawn and memorable. His protagonists, Bud and Marta, are as real as any fictional characters I've encountered and their story has everything: danger, suspense, love and confusion, and a deeply rooted commitment to one another that goes to the edge of death, and if necessary, beyond. Read this book. You won't regret it, or forget it.

I don't read a lot of westerns but a friend of mine recommended this one. Wow, this isn't your grandpa's pulp western. With *The Hardest Ride*, Rottman weaves a true-to-goodness feel for border Texas in the latter half of the 1800's. The story combines downhome period dialog with the action

you expect from a well-crafted novel. What I didn't expect, was the craftsmanship with which the drama, action, humor and even an unexpected romance were interwoven. Bud is a simple man with simple wants and needs: a good horse under him, a reliable six-gun on his hip, and an occasional pot of campfire frijole beans. From the very beginning of the story, his life is complicated and forever changed when he reluctantly picks up a mute young Mexican girl whose family has been killed by a renegade Indians. Slowly a bond between develops between the two, Not wanting to spoil the story, I'll just say that the Bud must battle rustlers, kidnappers, banditos, and cold-blooded killers before the gun smoke settles and he can once again settle into his simple life. The body count is high, but not exploitive, and the dead-on descriptions of the rugged South Texas-Northern Mexico terrain is dead on. I highly recommend this book.

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