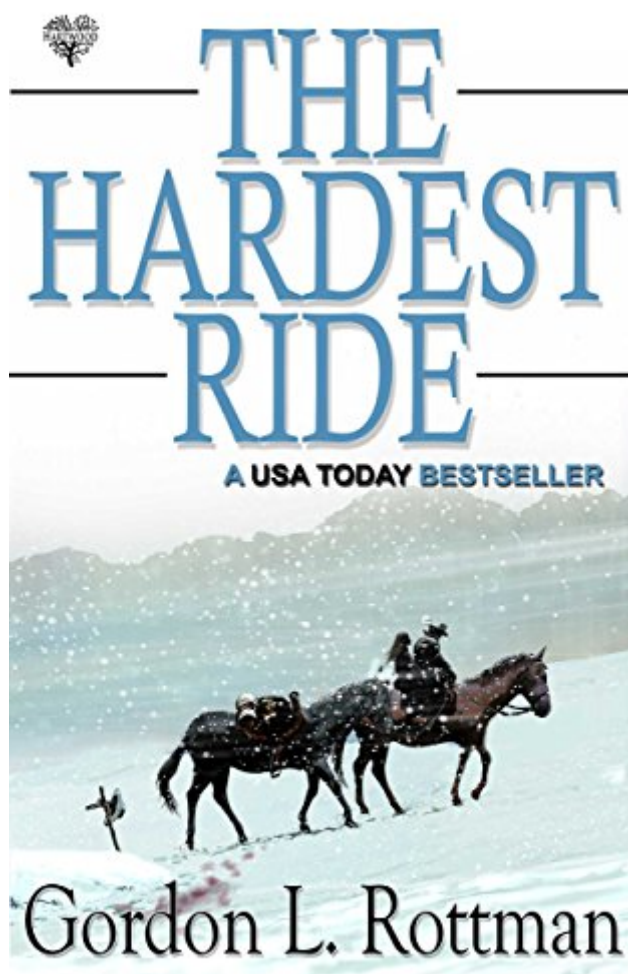


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# The Hardest Ride



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gritty story of the old West as it really was. No theatrics, everyone just buckling down to do what's necessary to survive. Young puncher Bud meets up with mute Mexican gal (Marta) that just lost her family to Indians. He sort of feels responsible for her figuring he will get rid of her soon. Doesn't happen. Instead they wind up working on a ranch. When the rancher's girls (and Marta) are stolen by Mexican bandits, the rancher and cowboys follow into Mexico. A very good look at the "old West". Very realistic. Learned some interesting facts about historic Western firearms I didn't know before.

The 1880's were apparently tough times in rural, cow country Texas. Just ask most 'punchers (cow punchers, or as we call them, cowboys). Bud is a young 'puncher who is looking for a ranch who'll hire him on. He comes across a family slaughtered by bandits, discovering one young girl, Marta, who survived. Since she and her family are Mexican, he plans to rid himself of her as soon as possible. (Mostly, Mexes and Texicans don't mix back then.) But you know how plans often get derailed. The story is about these two young people, with the backdrop of authentic life in Texas at the time. The mores, vernacular and conventions of the times and region are fully realized without a heavy lesson being laid on the reader. Being in the first person of our hero, Bud, helps the feel of the novel. If you're looking for a western with lots of action, you'll get it here. There are bad men, bandits, rustlers, and dishonest men of all descriptions. You also have good men who go far beyond normal capacity to right wrongs, especially on the hardest ride you could imagine. As I read this excellent novel, I kept thinking about how it could be turned into the iconic American western movie, and who could play the parts. If there are any producers and directors out there brave enough to film a gritty, true to life western, I urge them to choose this well crafted tale.

If this is not the best Western I have ever read, it's certainly at least equal to the very best. This is a truly wonderful story. It's simplicity, honesty, loyalty, perseverance, doing right, confusion and doubts. Full of action, realistic as hell. It's about a relationship,

an unusual one, and an example of doing what's right, regardless of consequences and any and all obstacles, however deadly or insurmountable. This is toughness. It's another world from our time and reads as if it were written back in that time.

I'm very picky when it comes to Westerns, having only read and liked half a dozen, (Lonesome Dove is my #1) and I'm adding this one to my list of very good stories. I have to care about the main character, and I'm liking this one such that after each chapter I want to see how the next turns out. I hate to put the book down at night when I read, and that is rare for me. I'm anxious now to see what else this author has written in hopes that it is as good as this.

O.K.! So I am hooked. Immediately following reading of this book, I looked up what else the author has written so I can purchase that too. This book takes place in the Big Bend Country of Texas and Coahuila, Mexico during the 1870's to 1880's. There is an interesting character in the protagonist. He is mentored by an older Mexican vaquero and is taught many life lessons right at the beginning of the book which you will see played out all through the book. The main character of the book finds a young Mexican girl of about 16, whose family has been wiped out and tortured. She is unable to speak. His odyssey starts as he tries to look after her until he can find a suitable place to leave her as he embarks on his original plan of going to a new job as a cow puncher. This book has intense suspense as several young women are captured by rustlers, including the one he has been trying to get rid of, and held for ransom. The search trails through the rough country of northern Mexico and the Big Bend area of Texas. There is some rather graphic violence and some sexual content but is relevant to the plot of the story. At the ending, I could not put this book down. It holds your interest entirely. I stayed up way too late because I was really into this story. If you like westerns, then by all means do not miss this one!

"The Hardest Ride" is unusual in my experience in Western novels for having well developed characters, a believable yet interesting plot, an excellent knowledge of the practical uses of period firearms, and a not very happy resolution. Many people, good and bad, die as a result of a neighboring rancher's greed, and the main characters only barely survive after having killed dozens, and watched many friends die. Bud, the main character, is a regular cowpunch with some hard-learned skills and many prejudices. He travels through the plot like a 19th century Ulysses, making good and bad decisions, and winning out painfully in the end by endurance rather than superhuman skill. Marta starts as a Mexican waif picked up by Bud out of charity, and after many

interactions and evolution, becomes "Bud's woman" in the best sense. The shooting scenes are realistic in their chaos and low hit percentages, and a wide variety of real period firearms are introduced to the reader with illuminating descriptions of their use. Some of the scenes in the book are reminiscent of "Unforgiven", which is I think a compliment. At the end, I think the author may have mixed up a Smith & Wesson short barreled Schofield (correctly identified as a likely Wells Fargo piece) with a double action Smith & Wesson Number 3 top break that Bud picks up earlier in the story. but that is a very minor and debatable quibble, and rests on the hazy question of whether Bud fired his last few shots out of his coat pocket. All in all this is a very fine read.

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