



The Devil's Country

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Former Texas Ranger Arlo Baines didn't come to the tiny West Texas town of Piedra Springs to cause trouble. After his wife and children were murdered, Arlo just wants to be left alone. Moving from place to place seems to be the only thing that eases the pain of his family's violent end.

But a chance encounter outside a bar forces him to rescue a terrified woman and her children from mysterious attackers. When the woman turns up murdered the next day—her children missing—Arlo becomes the primary suspect in exactly the same type of crime he is trying desperately to forget.

Haunted by the fate of his family, and with the police questioning the existence of the dead woman's children, Arlo decides it's his duty to find them. The question is, just how deep will he have to sink into the dusty secrets of Piedra Springs to save them and clear his name?

The Devil's Country Details

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From Reader Review The Devil's Country for online ebook

Elena Hartwell says

Fans of Lee Child will enjoy this action-packed mystery.

Michelle Lancaster says

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Harry Hunsicker

The Devil's Country

Thomas & Mercer

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April 11, 2017

The late writer John Gardner once said there are only two kinds of stories: a man goes on a journey, or a stranger comes to town. In Harry Hunsicker's new novel, *The Devil's Country*, a stranger comes to a strange town. The fictional Piedra Springs is the Twin Peaks of West Texas.

Former Texas Ranger Arlo Baines steps off a Greyhound bus in the tiny, remote ("badlands between Odessa and Sonora") Piedra Springs. Baines is an admitted "sucker for lost causes, stray pets, and people who couldn't quite fit into the groove of life." Sure enough, outside a bar during a thunderstorm Baines stumbles across Molly (who "looked like something from *Little House on the Prairie*") and her two children. She tells Baines she and her children have escaped and if he doesn't help them, they'll be killed. Then the town's tornado siren begins screeching. Baines takes cover inside the bar, and when he goes back out after the all-clear to look for the woman and her kids, they're gone. When Molly's body is found the next day, Baines falls under suspicion and must solve the mystery and find the missing children to clear his name.

Hunsicker knows his small West Texas towns, fictional or no. Of Piedra Springs he writes, "You either had business there or were trying to avoid business somewhere else." But when a storm approaches they are blessed with "a cool wind that smelled like ozone and sage." For a dying town, Piedra Springs has a lot going on: Russian mafia, a mysterious Bentley driving around, public corruption, bankers ("to not pay was a grave sin, a heinous crime, akin to ... voting for a socialist"), a cult ("the Old and New Testament mixed with *Star Trek*"), a sort of underground railroad, and the dark web.

Baines's first-person narrative is told in choppy, simple prose. Great genre-phrases include, "Jimmy and Dales' Broken Promise [a bar] ... had low ceiling and even lower expectations." The town sheriff has a Texas drawl "strong as new rope." Though Hunsicker has a habit of announcing what his characters will do next instead of just doing it ("I decided to check if someone at the restaurant had seen Molly leave the parking lot," Baines announces to us), this is infrequent.

Hunsicker is surprisingly moving at times, and leavens the mayhem and darkness with humor. "Wisdom comes from the strangest of places," Baines muses, "like a philandering Texas Ranger in a Chinese restaurant a hundred miles past the exit for the middle of nowhere. Bubba Confucius." And sometimes he waxes eloquent: "Men have been men since time began. Some have lusts best not described, for fear that

others will fall prey to their particular strains of darkness.”

The Devil’s Country features a quirky cast of characters, plus many secrets and subtexts, and is packed with unexpected turns and twists. If this is the first in a new series, the premise of a lone ranger on the road offers practically inexhaustible possibilities. Hunsicker sets the hook in a short prologue, and the action hurtles forward until the very end with expert clue placement and a distinctive Texas noir style.

Originally published in Lone Star Literary Life.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

All Arlo wants is to be left alone. Since his family was murdered has he been drifting from place to place and now he has come to Piedro Springs. What he didn't anticipate were the woman begging him to help her and her children and neither did he anticipate everything that happens next. The woman ends up dead and the sheriff seems less than thrilled about having Arlo in his town. This is a town with secrets, secrets that they are hellbent on keeping, but Arlo will not give up his hunt for the woman's children's.

The Devil's Country is a thrilling book about a man with a tragic past. In many ways did Arlo Baines reminded remind me of Jack Reacher especially since the last Reacher book I read had a similar concept as this one. I quite liked Arlo. Arlo's life as a Texas Ranger ended when his family was murdered and we get the full story in this book in flashbacks to the past.

The missing kids and the woman that were killed belonged to a cult and there is something wrong with it. However, the cult basically owns half the town so it's hard to get anyone to talk. But, there is a journalist there whose sister joined the cult and together they try to find out what happened to the children as well as the journalist's niece.

Lots of action, an interesting story, and a very tragic ending. I liked this book and I liked Arlo. I hope to read more books with him because he was such an interesting character and I would like to see some happiness in his life again.

I want to thank the publisher for providing me with a free copy through NetGalley for an honest review!

Albert says

The Devil's Country by Harry Hunsicker is a well written mystery that unfortunately just doesn't offer up anything to separate it from the thousands of other novels in this genre. It is far too formulaic; lone stranger in town, ex law enforcement who wants to be left alone, stumbles onto a crime he just cannot turn his back on and now must step in and save the day where local law enforcement and the FBI cannot. Add to it a backstory for the main character that distracts from what is really the story here.

Arlo Baines is an former Texas Ranger, moving from town to town as he tries to put the murder of his wife and children behind him. The events surrounding those murders has made Arlo a pariah among law enforcement as not only were his family killed, but several decorated police Detectives died as well. Now Arlo just wants to be left alone as he travels in the rural towns of Texas. That is, until he finds himself in the

west Texas town of Piedra Springs and a chance encounter outside the local bar he cannot turn his back on.

Now Arlo finds himself the primary suspect of the murder of a woman and with her two children missing, something the local police don't want to seem to dig too far into. He is told to leave town but Arlo can't. He needs to find out who murdered the woman and what happened to her two children. A crime that reminds him deeply of what happened to his own family.

But when the FBI shows up, Arlo's past gets dragged in as well and now he has the police, the FBI and a suspicious town to deal with. But the question seems to be what has the religious cult just outside of town have to do with the missing children and the dead woman. Then the new men in town who look like Russian mob. And there is that reporter who seems to know a little too much about the town and Arlo.

Time is running out for the missing children and Arlo has to decide how involved he wants to get before it's too late.

As a story and as a character, Arlo will suffer from the obvious comparisons to the likes of Jack Reacher and Charlie Parker. The manner in how he deals with the murders of his family seems hard to understand. Riding from town to town on a bus with no where in particular to go? Being ostracized from law enforcement because he takes revenge on the ones who murdered his wife and kids? Now to be in a town that lives in fear of a religious cult with dead women and missing children that no one seems to want to look into? Any one of these plots would have made for a good book, but all of them in one is somewhat overwhelming and as a reader, you lose the suspension of belief. At that point you can only hope that the writing alone is good enough to carry forward and in this case, it just isn't.

The Devil's Country is not a bad book, it just isn't a very good one. And in this genre, there are just too many good ones out there.

Petra says

The Devil's Country is a Jack-Reacher-type story set in Texas. Since the murder of his family, former Texas ranger Arlo Baines has been moving from town to town wanting to be left alone to catch up on his reading. Arriving in a tiny town in West Texas, Arlo becomes involved in an altercation between a couple of thugs and an oddly dressed woman and her two children. When the woman is found dead the following morning, Arlo becomes a suspect but vows to find out what happened to the two children.

This was your typical lone ranger takes on entire town scenario involving an obscure cult, corrupt cops, a female journalist who could become a potential love interest and turns into something like his sidekick and the Russian mafia (with the stereotypical Boris for good measure). Through flashbacks, the reader discovers Arlo's back-story and what exactly happened to his family.

It was a little crammed with formulaic stuff, the back and forth made it choppy in parts, and the repetitiveness of the character announcing 'this is what I'll do' followed by a sentence where he is then actually doing this exact thing became a little wearing.

On the other hand, some passages and descriptions were really well done, the setting was atmospheric and it contained some nice humor.

If you're looking for some light entertainment and fancy a good old action movie type novel with a hero who

will destroy all evil then this should appeal. There was nothing much wrong with it, but there also wasn't anything special or innovative. I liked it well enough, hence 3 stars.

I was invited to read an ARC and opinions expressed are entirely my own. Thanks to the publisher.

Barb Klein says

“The Devil’s Country” by Harry Hunsicker is a murder mystery, thriller, crime novel about a former Texas Ranger. Arlo Baines is roaming Texas by bus, or by hitchhiking. All he wants to do is be in peace and read his books. Trouble seems to find him wherever he goes. He is desperately trying to come to terms with the deaths of his wife and two children. In his grief and rage, he coerces his father-in-law to kill the dirty cops who took his family’s lives. His father-in-law was in league with some pretty unsavory characters, and was involved in money-laundering along with the three cops who paid the price for destroying Arlo’s family. Although there was not enough evidence to convict him of those deaths, former Texas Rangers were not so quick to defend his actions.

He stops in a little town in west Texas for a couple of days before moving on. As he leaves a bar after having a drink, he is drawn to a harrowing scene. A young mother thinks that he is her contact. There are people after her and her two children; they want to kill them. Two men try to take her, but Arlo steps in. The next day the sheriff sees him as a possible suspect in a murder, the murder of the young woman. There is no trace of the children. Arlo vows to find her murderer and the whereabouts of the children before he leaves town. The police do not believe his story about the two missing children.

It seems that there is a conspiracy between the townspeople and some other faction. It is as though something sinister has taken over the town and Arlo is determined to find out what is holding the people in fear. What he discovers will put a chill through you as you read.

Mr. Hunsicker is a very good mystery writer and I thought the characters had a depth that was brought out throughout the story. Although I enjoyed reading his writing, I am not a great fan of this kind of thriller...too brutal, and the subject matter is distasteful.

I was sent a complimentary print copy by Night Owl Reviews in return for my honest review. You can find this review on my blog at <http://wp.me/p2pjIt-pd>, and also other reviews on my blog at <http://imhookedonbooks.wordpress.com>.

Mike says

Nine months after his family was murdered and eight months after being discharged from the Texas Rangers, Arlo Baines has become a drifter. Rambling across Texas by bus, getting off when he gets the urge to stretch his legs... doing what he wants when he wants.

This time Arlo finds himself in Piedra Springs, a tiny West Texas town located in the badlands between Odessa and Sonora, "a long way from anywhere that mattered." All he really wants is a quiet corner, a good book, maybe a cup of coffee or a beer. But, there wouldn't be much of a story to tell if that happened, would there?

Before he knows it Arlo Baines gets mixed up with the murder of a mysterious woman, the disappearance of her two young children, Russian mobsters, and the enigmatic Silas McPherson who is somehow connected with a powerful religious cult.

Fast paced novel told in the first person. Not the most original plot but it all comes together fairly well. There is a bit of a Jack Reacher-type thing going on here, though Harry Hunsicker is not quite as gifted a writer as Lee Child (no offense intended). Think of it as a sort of streamlined version of a Reacher novel or perhaps Jack Reacher-lite.

I am not a major Jack Reacher fan, I've read a few of the books and I'll probably read more but I don't seek them out or wait in anticipation for the newest edition. I say this as a full disclosure that while I found the book to have Reacher-like qualities I can't guarantee that others will.

Still, I would absolutely recommend this book - on its OWN merits - to anyone who enjoys Lee Child or similar authors.

There is some sexual content, harsh language and violence.

***Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for allowing me the opportunity to read and review this title

Carrie says

The only way to cope with losing his wife and children for Arlo Baines has been to keep on the move around the state of Texas. Hopping off a bus in the small town of Piedra Springs however brings Arlo into the middle of a mystery. Arlo used to be a Texas Ranger before the loss of his family and when outside of the small bar he happened upon a woman and her two children seem to be in danger Arlo can't help but interject.

The next day after saving the woman and her children from two thugs though Arlo finds out that the woman has turned up murdered and the children are nowhere to be found. The local sheriff of course has every reason to suspect the newcomer but Arlo maintains his innocents and insists they much find the missing children.

The Devil's Country is a fast paced suspense read where former Texas Ranger finds himself deeply involved in a mystery in the small town he'd stopped in. Because of Arlo's past he isn't exactly friendly with the law but since he had been a Ranger he's trained to investigate so that put him in his own one man army trying to solve a crime that the locals didn't seem to want to investigate.

The story also contains a lot of flashing back to build up Arlo's character and slowly let readers learn of his past and just what really happened to his family. Both the past and the current really seemed to hold my interest as the story developed and was a bit surprised at how the whole story turned out.

I received an advance copy from the publisher via NetGalley.

For more reviews please visit <https://carriesbookreviews.wordpress....>

Liz says

A fast paced mystery about an ex-Texas Ranger. Nothing fancy here, just good clean fun. Arlo Baines ends up in a small west Texas town and helps a woman and two children escape two thugs. But the next morning, the woman turns up dead and Arlo is seen as the prime suspect.

There's a touch of Jack Reacher to this story. One man against the world. This is action movie simple. In a bygone year, Bruce Willis would play the lead. Or Tom Cruise, despite the height discrepancy. Lots of fights, one man against multiples. Of course, the good guy is impossibly good and talented. There's a woman, of course, that helps him, an ex-reporter from The NY Times. What character development there is comes in the form of flashbacks to Arlo's earlier life when his family is alive and he's still a Ranger.

This is the first Harry Hunsicker book I've read. A constant diet of this kind of book would wear thin, but once every now and then is a fun break from the serious literature.

My thanks to netgalley and Thomas & Mercer for an advance copy of this book.

Cheri says

Enjoyed it quite a lot. The protagonist isn't unique in the genre but he was well-written. Emotionally damaged loner who gets into more trouble than he expects while trying to help people.

If another book featuring Arlo Baines is in the works, I'll certainly read it.

Bam says

This mystery is a good, quick read--a nice change of pace from some heavier reading. The hero of the story is Arlo Baines, a former Texas Ranger, who is traveling the countryside by bus, seeking solitude and anonymity after the murder of his wife and children. Arlo is strong and intelligent and able to handle himself in most any situation--yes, very much a Jack Reacher kind of guy, so if you enjoy those stories, you'll probably also enjoy this book.

There are really two stories here and Arlo relates them both in first-person narrative. In the present day, he decides to get off the bus in the small town of Piedra Springs, TX and almost immediately gets involved with helping a desperate woman and her children. When she is found murdered the next morning, the local sheriff of course suspects the new man in town. Who owns the sheriff and what is really going on in the dying little town?

The other half of the story, told in flashbacks, is about what happened to Arlo's family. These memories are bittersweet, filled with the mistakes people make that can lead to tragedy. Perhaps Arlo can redeem himself by helping others in trouble?

The ancillary characters add more dimension to the story. Arlo meets a young journalist from NYC named

Hannah, who seems to be following the same trail of clues to the mystery as Arlo but from a different direction and the two make a great team, creating some humorous moments and a whiff of romance. I hope Hunsicker will consider bringing her back if this becomes a series.

A note of warning to sensitive readers: When Arlo and Hannah figure out what is really going on in Piedra Springs, it's pretty shocking and unthinkable, so please bear that in mind.

I received an arc of this book through NetGalley but never got around to reading it in a timely manner. I apologize to the publisher and author for that slip. I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys lots of action with an intriguing mystery.

Ed says

Former Texas Ranger Arlo Baines is a Jack Reacher-like drifter just looking to quietly read and drink beer in a Piedra Springs Texas dive bar named Dale's Broken Promise. He shortly gets interrupted by a tornado where he unavoidably runs into a strange woman on the run with her two young children. Arlo suspects the woman and her children are in some kind of danger but hits a stone wall with the local Sheriff and townspeople when he starts to search for them. It's an entertaining low voltage mystery sparked by Arlo's back story which include the murder (and revenge) of his wife and two children. I added an additional star for the very cool "Kindle in Motion" illustrations because basically, I'm easily amused!

Donna Davis says

Harry Hunsicker is the former executive vice president of the Mystery Writers of America as well as a successful author. Reading this suspenseful and at times almost surreal tale makes it easy to understand why so many people want to read his work. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. Thanks go to Net Galley and to Thomas and Mercer for the DRC, which I received in exchange for this honest review. This book is available to the public April 11, 2017.

Arlo Baines, a former Texas Ranger, is on the road when it all unfolds; he's stopped at the tiny town of Piedra Springs, traveling from one place to another by Greyhound Bus, and he doesn't intend to stay. He finds a place to get some food, sticks his nose in a copy of Gibbon, and tries to ignore everyone around him. Friendly conversation? Thank you, but no.

Unfortunately for him, there's a woman with kids, and she's in big trouble. Clad in an outfit that screams sister-wife, she is terrified, tells him she is pursued, and next thing he knows, she is dead. What happened to the children? Before he knows it, Baines is hip deep in the smoldering drama of the Sky of Zion, a cult that has deep tentacles into the local business and law enforcement establishments.

The narrative shifts smoothly back and forth between the past and the present, and Baines's motivation is revealed. He is on the move because his wife and child were murdered by corrupt cops, who he then had killed. One particularly chilling scene, the one in which Baines is told to leave town, gives me shivers. In general, however, I find that the scenes taking place in the present are more gripping and resonant than those in the past.

Interesting side characters are Boone, a retired professor with a crease on his head and flip-flops that are falling apart; the local sheriff, Quang Marsh; journalist Hannah Byrnes; and the bad guys in Tom Mix-style hats, with the crease down the front. Setting is also strong here, and I can almost taste the dust in my mouth as Baines pursues his quest in this little town with quiet determination. Every time I make a prediction, something else—and something better—happens instead. In places, it's laugh-out-loud funny!

Readers that love a good thriller and whose world view leans toward the left will find this a deeply satisfying read. Hunsicker kicks stereotypes to the curb and delivers a story unlike anyone else's. I would love to see this become a series.

Stewart Tame says

Full disclosure: I won a free Kindle copy of this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

Former Texas Ranger, Arlo Baines, just wants to be left alone to travel aimlessly and read and forget the recent killing of his wife and children. In the middle of nowhere, the sleepy town of Piedra Springs, he's quietly reading Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* when trouble enters his life in the form of Molly, a mysterious woman with her two children, on the run from ... someone. Before Arlo knows it, he's drawn in to the mysteries of Piedra Springs ...

Not a bad little detective novel. Arlo is a fine protagonist, smart and capable, dealing with the unexpected turns his life has taken as best he can. We get flashbacks throughout the book telling the story of what happened to his family. Although set in the present day, this has some of the feel of a Western to it, and not just because of the rural Texas setting.

The Kindle copy I read features something called Kindle in Motion. On the one hand, every time I see the phrase, the Dead Can Dance song, "Chaos in Motion," starts running through my head, which is a good thing. Unfortunately, Kindle in Motion itself is a cheap gimmick. The text is interspersed with pictures, and some of them are brief film clips. That's it. I can't imagine who would be set against reading this, only to change their mind upon learning it's a KIM title ("But it's got pictures. And they mooooo-ooove.") It doesn't add anything significant to the reading experience except an increase in the file size. The book's not bad, but skip the Kindle in Motion if you can.

Jessica Bronder says

Arlo Baines was a Texas Ranger that lost his family and travels around Texas to deal with their loss. He gets off the bus in Piera Springs and comes across a woman and her two children being harassed by two thugs. Arlo steps in and saves the woman but the next morning he discovers that the woman has been killed and her kids are missing. Of course Arlo is the main suspect and he decides to take the investigation into his own hands.

Arlo has his own troubles but when he is accused of the murder of the woman he decides to step up and investigate since no one else really is making any moves too. It seems the woman was involved in a local

cult that owns half of the town. But he gets a break when he meets a journalist with a sister in the cult.

This is a great thriller with lots of action and a one man army. As you follow along on the present day investigation you get some flash backs and learn what happened to Arlo's family. If you love high action, kick butt thrillers, look no further.

I received The Devil's Country from Little Bird Publicity for free. This has in no way influenced my opinion of this book.
