



The High Divide

Lin Enger

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“A deeply moving, gripping novel about one man’s quest for redemption and his family’s determination to learn the truth . . . Layered with meaning, this remarkable novel deserves to be read more than once. *The High Divide* proves Enger’s chops as a masterful storyteller.” —Ann Weisgarber, author of *The Promise*

In 1886, Gretta Pope wakes one morning to discover that her husband is gone. Ulysses Pope has left his family behind on the far edge of Minnesota’s western prairie with only the briefest of notes and no explanation for why he left or where he’s headed. It doesn’t take long for Gretta’s young sons, Eli and Danny, to set off after him, following the scant clues they can find, jumping trains to get where they need to go, and ending up in the rugged badlands of Montana.

Gretta has no choice but to search for her sons and her husband, leading her to the doorstep of a woman who seems intent on making Ulysses her own. Meanwhile, the boys find that the closer they come to Ulysses’ trail, the greater the perils that confront them, until each is faced with a choice about whom he will defend, and who he will become.

Enger’s breathtaking portrait of the vast plains landscape is matched by the rich expanse of his characters’ emotional terrain, as pivotal historical events--the bloody turmoil of expansionism, the near total demise of the bison herds, and the subjugation of the Plains Indians--blend seamlessly with the intimate story of a family’s sacrifice and devotion.

“Lin Enger sets out from the conventions of the traditional Western and brings the reader into new emotional territory, that of the soul of an exquisitely drawn American family. Told with caring patience and precise language, *The High Divide* is a novel to get lost in.” —James Scott, author of *The Kept*

“*The High Divide*, a novel about a family in peril, is haunting and tense but leavened by considerable warmth and humanity. Lin Enger writes with durable grace about a man’s quest for redemption and the human capacity for forgiveness.” —Benjamin Percy, author of *Red Moon*

The High Divide Details

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From Reader Review The High Divide for online ebook

J.K. Grice says

A stunning historical fiction novel, Enger delivers convincing characters and a compelling story in this bygone mystery and adventure odyssey. THE HIGH DIVIDE is good reading.

Rebecca says

Enger's second novel, set in 1886, ranges from Minnesota to Montana to track a herd of buffalo – and one family seeking to make amends. Atmosphere is key; the book works well as a snapshot of a particular time and place. Sacrifice, family loyalty, remorse, and being or treating a stranger are all strong themes. Enger also exposes the shadow side of legends: General Custer does not seem such a heroic figure once details of the Washita Indian massacre come to light, and Ulysses's name reminds readers that myths (Homer's *Odyssey*) do not always end rosily.

With its poetic descriptive language and authentic yet slightly archaic vocabulary (chifforobe, spraddle-legged), *The High Divide* fits clearly into the tradition of the modern literary Western, a lineage that includes John Williams's *Butcher's Crossing* and, more recently, Philipp Meyer's *The Son*. Perhaps it is most memorable, however, as a story of enduring family ties and the possibility of new beginnings, in spite of trauma.

(Non-subscribers can read an excerpt of my full review at BookBrowse.)

Nan Williams says

This one just didn't do it for me. I struggled through the first half before deciding that whatever the deep dark secrets were, was not worth my time and effort.

I'm sorry. It was boring, boring, boring. All I got out of the first half was that there were secrets being concealed from everyone. Not my kind of book nor my journey in life.

I think this whole "secret" business got started with the "Secret Life of Bees." Since that time, many and multiple authors have jumped on that bandwagon and tried to make a go of building a plot around "secrets." I'm really tired of this. I enjoyed "Secret Life of Bees," but have not enjoyed any of the copy-cats nor wanna-bees.

Schuyler Wallace says

Lin Enger has written a classic novel of family disorder in nineteenth century United States centering in the

vastness of Minnesota, the Dakotas and Montana. It's not a new story; a man driven by hidden urges leaves his wife and young boys and disappears. That wasn't uncommon for the time as poverty and restlessness dominated many lives and caused emotional separations. Many books have been written on this theme.

Enger's characterizations pull this novel above the norm and features a father with strange influences that pull him, two boys, one strong willed and the other, equally strong but weakened by frailness, and a plucky wife and mother who never abandons the hope of regaining solid and united family ties. The boys leave home without telling their mother, with the intention of locating their father, and endure the privation of travel through a vast landscape of rugged terrain, frigid weather, and scant food. Mother follows, finding clues to their whereabouts that are both frustrating and troubling to her effort of unifying her family.

Enger has the knack of creating realistic dialogue, indelible portraits of a wild country, and personification of his characters that conveys ambition, fidelity, and indomitable will. This is a memorable story that sings with a familial closeness that rises above constant questions stirred by the strong feelings of abandonment.

There are great moments of insight in the story, along with heroic actions by the boys that bring warmth and empathy to their journey. I strongly recommend reading this intriguing and uplifting novel.

Marsha says

This is a very personal 5 rating because I realize this is not a perfect novel, but I loved it.

Carol says

This is a story of a journey, a man's quest for redemption. Ulysses leaves his home in Western Minnesota in 1886, without telling his wife or sons. He simply disappears into the Dakotas. With little to go on, his young sons go after him without a word to their mom. Then Gretta, Ulysses wife also leaves, hoping to find answers back in St. Paul where she met him right after the Civil War, hoping to find her boys and her husband. The novel is the story of a man hiding his past from his family, of a son searching for his father while he cares for his 10 year old brother, and a wife who doubts the man she loves

This novel has stayed with me and I continue to return to the West so beautifully described by the author. I keep thinking of the family, of the event that sent Ulysses searching for redemption. I think of the other regrettable actions described in the book and how we, the people of the United States failed the Native Americans and failed what once was the West.

One of the better novels I've read in a long time. A thoughtful, evocative, and profound novel. Must read more by him.

Marian Bart says

At the library, I kindof picked this book by mistake, but I am so glad I did. It is consistently interesting, rich

in meaning, and beautifully constructed.

Laura (booksnob) says

The High Divide by Lin Enger

Ulysses Pope has a secret past that is haunting him. He is a veteran from the Civil War living in a small home with his wife and two children in a Northern Minnesotan town called Sloan's Crossing in 1886. Ulysses is restless and after a argument with his wife, Greta he leaves and doesn't return home. He is headed West to atone for his sins and make peace with his soul. He travels through North Dakota to meet up with an old friend and then he plans to go to Montana, to the Northern Cheyenne reservation to meet up with a man from his past called, Magpie.

His boys, Eli and Danny take off after their father, to bring him home. They are desperate to find him and find out why he hasn't returned. They wonder if their is another woman and when they intercept a letter, they hop the train and head West to follow Ulysses's trail.

Gretta Pope is hopeless without her boys and wondering what has happened in her marriage to cause Ulysses to leave and not return. She heads to St. Paul, where they first met, to find him. There she encounters his sister and learns the truth of Ulysses service in the army and she wonders what other lies he has told her. She sets out on a journey West to find her boys.

The High Divide is historical fiction at its finest. The High Divide combines historical events with the drama of the old west, the love of family and the pivotal decisions we must face. The story of the Pope family is layered, with the chapters rotating in voice and setting. The High Divide is compelling and captivating. The three distinct voices give you a story that propels you to turn each page with anticipation.

Lin Enger is an awesome storyteller and good writing runs in the family as his brother (Leif Enger) has some really awesome books too. I learned so much about the history and geography of the West and about the Smithsonian and the demise of the buffalo. The High Divide is an action packed, mystery of the west, a re-imagining of Homer's Odyssey, and a story of love and forgiveness. The writing is poetic and evocative and Enger handles the loss of the American Indian land and their subsequent decimation with a caring consciousness.

The High Divide is a rich portrayal of the American West and the impact of westward expansion on the American Indian.

I have a cool unexpected connection to The High Divide by Lin Enger. Coming up this July in 2016, I am chaperoning a trip to Montana to do service work on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. I had no idea when I started reading this book that I would going to some of the places in it and now I feel excitement and a desire to visit the reservation and other places, like Miles City, Little Big Horn, the Badlands and more. I love it when what you read connects to your life. I am recommending this book to everyone who is traveling with me. You should read it too.

Diane S ? says

All the flavors and atmosphere of the Old West. Flashbacks regarding Custer and his atrocities against the Indians and William Barnaby, from the Smithsonian who wants to kill and stuff as many buffaloes as he can before they disappear completely. Set in 1886, starting in Minnesota, we meet Greta Pope, a woman alone now that her husband has left, whereabouts unknown. Her two sons taking off to track down their father, Ulysses. Yes, another Ulysses off on his own quest, leaving his wife in dire straits, unable to pay the rent and leaving her to the mercies of the owner, who wants to own Greta. So from the beginning I was more than a little angry at Ulysses.

This was a time of itinerant traveling preachers, one whose message seems to change Ulysses. Where woman alone had very little recourse and the easiest way to travel was by boxcar. Ultimately it is a novel of forgiveness and redemption as we find out the reasons for Ulysses's flight. Loved their two sons, such wonderful characters and admired the strength of Greta. Can Greta find it in her heart to forgive and find a way for their family to once again become complete?

Susan Bennett says

I enjoyed this book from start to finish. I would describe this book as a Western, but there are so many layers to it. It's hard for me to pick a favorite character, but I think I liked the oldest son the most and for him and his younger brother, this is a coming-of-age story. Again, there are many layers to the novel and the brothers' point of view is just one. It was bittersweet for me to read about the beauty and freedom of the American West and the atrocities committed in the name of westward expansion.

Marvin says

This novel by Lin Enger, brother of Leif Enger, the author of the wonderful *Peace Like a River*, is reminiscent of that one. Set in 1886, it's the story of a family--father, mother, two teenaged sons--dealing with the father's desertion. The two boys set out from their home in western Minnesota for the West in search of their father, and eventually the mother does so as well. Meanwhile, we learn of the father's pilgrimage to come to terms with his soldier past. In the course of the story, all four members of the family learn much about themselves and their relationship with each other. The conservationist William Hornaday and his 1886 mission to hunt what he believes are the last surviving buffalo play an important supporting role in the story. At times a little too neat and unbelievable, it's nonetheless a powerful family story.

Mary says

Set against the backdrop of the American West, this quiet book is about one man's all-consuming quest for redemption and how it affects his wife and two sons. The writing is lovely and the characters are complex, interesting, and believable. The boys, especially, deserve more page time. They do a lot of growing up within the framework of the story, and their journey to find their father intrigued me more than other aspects of the

story. Though I couldn't quite support the main character's unexplained decision to leave his family - a conversation seemed necessary (and practical!), I can see why the author chose to plot the book the way he did. The ending was beautiful: understated and very touching. Earned this book another half star from me!

3.5/5

Jessaka says

When Greta and her two sons woke up the next morning he was gone. It couldn't have hurt more, but Greta knew that Ulysses was leaving, maybe it was the way he acted the night before, the fight they had had, or something he had said. Her youngest son by 5 years ran off to find him, but his brother Eli dragged him back home, kicking and screaming. Two months went by, but he still hadn't returned, never wrote, and never even sent money. Greta had the rent to pay, needed food for the boys. What kind of man just walks off from his family like this?

Then one day a letter came, not from Eli's father but from a woman who had written to his father, and Eli intercepted it. Maybe he was with her now. Eli packed a bag, some food and some clothes, and then like his father, he walked out into the night. Danny again followed. And then Greta had to find her sons. And at first it seemed like a fun adventure, the boys hopping trains, meeting people along the way, surviving, and Greta taking what money she had and buying a ticket on the train so she could find her boys.

Eli's dad Ulysses was haunted by the war, Custer's war. What happened that he couldn't talk to his wife about it? Why did it cause him to just get up and leave? I thought, "Who did he kill, women and children?" These are the things that haunt a man who has been in a war. But maybe it was something different.

In time we learn that Ulysses is picking up buffalo bones in the wilderness in order to sell them. I thought of how he was helping remove every last bit of evidence of the slaughter of these majestic creatures. It has never been the same, what is lost is lost, just as it won't be the same for Ulysses and his family after all that had happened. It can't be.

Yesterday, my husband and I drove to the edge of town where they have a new development going in; it had always been a place to walk our dog. Large oak trees had been cut down and put into a pile and had sat there for two years, bleached. My husband saw firewood; I saw buffalos rotting and bleached bones.

/rating/voters/2224328115?resource_type=Review

Cher says

2 stars - Meh. Just ok.

I didn't find this one to be deeply moving and it certainly was not gripping, so the synopsis is a bit misleading. I liked it enough to read through to the end though I never felt very connected to the story and the ending was far from being a saving grace. For me, it was a passable, but overall very slow story.

Favorite Quote: N/A.

First Sentence: That summer was cool and windless, the clouds unrelenting, as if God had reached out his hand one day and nudged the sun from its rightful place.

Sam Sattler says

"The High Divide" is the story of a man with a past, a past that he is embarrassed to share with his wife and sons, a past that haunts him so continuously and so badly that he is compelled to find a way to make things right - or die trying. This is why early one 1886 morning, with only a hidden note left behind to mark his leaving, Ulysses Pope leaves his Minnesota home behind, effectively abandoning his wife and sons to the mercy of the man who owns the mortgage on the Pope home - a man not above using that leverage to gain favor's from Pope's wife.

Gretta Pope is determined to do whatever she has to do to take care of her two sons, Eli and Danny. Anything. But when she wakes up one morning not long after her husband's disappearance and finds herself completely alone, she is determined to find her sons. Did her husband sneak back into town and kidnap them or did they go looking for him? She has no idea, but Gretta is a strong woman and she is not going to stop searching for the truth - and her sons - until she finds out exactly what is happening.

As the search for Ulysses Pope unfolds, author Lin Enger tells his story from three simultaneous points-of-view: that of Ulysses Pope himself, that of his two sons, and that of his wife. Eventually, the paths of the various family members will cross and intermix. But before "The High Divide" reaches its emotional climax, the reader will be carried on an adventure spanning the state of Minnesota and the Dakota and Montana territories - an adventure during which the Pope boys grow into young men, Gretta Pope learns exactly who she married, and Ulysses Pope manages to quiet his demons, if not dispose of them. The ultimate question is not will the Pope family ever be the same; the real question is whether or not it can even survive Ulysses Pope's quest.

"The High Divide" is a remarkable piece of historical fiction that takes place in an America not quite ready for the twentieth century. I highly recommend this one.
