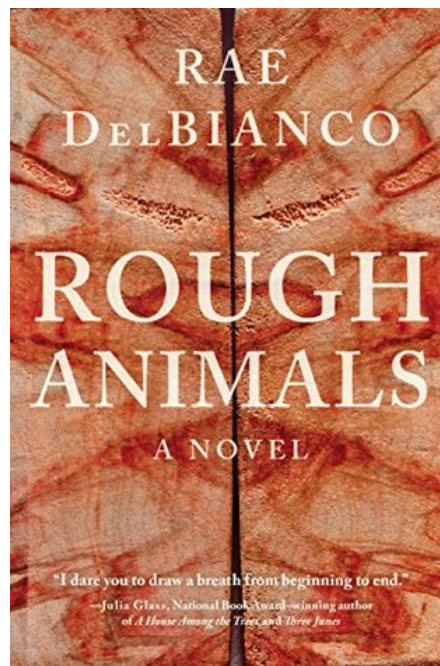




Rough Animals: An American Western Thriller

Rae DelBianco

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Ever since their father's untimely death five years before, Wyatt Smith and his inseparably close twin sister, Lucy, have scraped by alone on their family's isolated ranch in Box Elder County, Utah. That is until one morning when, just after spotting one of their bulls lying dead in the field, Wyatt is hit in the arm by a hail of gunfire that takes four more cattle with it. The shooter: a fever-eyed, fearsome girl-child with an outdated TEC-9 in her left hand and a worn shotgun in her right. They hold the girl captive, but she breaks loose overnight and heads south into the desert. With the dawning realization that the loss of cattle will mean the certain loss of the ranch, Wyatt feels he has no choice but to go after her and somehow find restitution for what's been lost.

Wyatt's decision sets him on an epic twelve-day odyssey through a nightmarish underworld he only half understands; a world that pitches him not only against the primordial ways of men and the beautiful yet brutally unforgiving landscape, but also against himself. As he winds his way down from the mountains of Box Elder to the mesas of Monument Valley and back, Wyatt is forced to look for the first time at who he is and what he's capable of, and how those hard truths set him irrevocably apart from the one person he's ever really known and loved. Steeped in a mythic, wildly alive language of its own, and gripping from the first gunshot to the last, *Rough Animals* is a tour de force from a powerful new voice.

Rough Animals: An American Western Thriller Details

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From Reader Review Rough Animals: An American Western Thriller for online ebook

Alyssa - Forest Noir Photography + Reviews says

Wyatt Smith and his twin sister, Lucy, have lived in isolation, barely getting by on a lonesome ranch in Box Elder County, Utah since the accidental death of their father. One morning, Wyatt is shot in the arm, surprised by rapid gunfire that also claims four of his precious cattle. A feral, mud caked, and fiery young girl with an exceptional aim is guilty for the loss of his livestock, and the potential loss of the ranch. The meager ranch is the only home they siblings have ever known or wished to know, and they hold the girl captive, demanding restitution. She breaks loose overnight and Wyatt follows her to the unforgiving desert where heat, guns and cruelty are king. The unnamed girl, mysterious and deadly, leads him to a gritty criminal underworld. What follows is an odyssey through a sun-soaked, bloody nightmare, where Wyatt has no choice but to confront himself and his thoughts under the open hot sky of the desert. Rife with shootouts, hauntingly beautiful descriptions of the uncultivated wilds of Utah, Rough Animals reads like McCarthy's best work with a dash of Tarantino's cinematic mythology.

I LOVED this book and think it's the ideal modern western. BRAVO Rae!

Rae sent me a copy of this to review, and these are all my own honest opinions.

Ralph Badders says

Rae DelBianco has gifted us with a magnificent novel, a gripping plot, and written in a style that is impossible to put down. I found Rae Delbianco's epic novel to combine the descriptive majesty of Louis L'Amour with the Cormac McCarthy mastery of a story but in a language all her own. Witness a storyline that keeps the pages turning in this extraordinary and realistic presentation. An unwavering excellence is the hallmark of this novel!

Paul Falk says

Rae Del Bianco penned a well-written tale with a storyline that swung far and wide. Just over halfway through, about the time I was considering that the novel might have been better suited as a novella, the scene took a devilish twist. It was just what it needed. Actually, what I needed. The main characters were well-drawn. Into the home stretch, I was unaware of the blockbuster ending that waited ahead.

23-year-old Wyatt Smith lives with his twin sister Lucy out in the sticks in Box Elder County, Utah. Try as they might, they're barely scraping by on their small cattle farm. As if it wasn't already bad enough, it soon worsened. Their precious livestock had been attacked. Several had been shot to death. With shotgun in hand, Wyatt confronted the attacker. It turned out to be a girl. One that had been specially trained. A gunfight ensued. She fled. It was never fully explained what brought the girl to their remote farm in the first place. No reasonable explanation was suggested for her to engage in such rampage.

The murder of the livestock had been enough to sink the farm that had already been teeter tottering on the edge of bankruptcy. The assassin needed to pay with either restitution or her life. The former was preferred.

The young girl gave the appearance of a runaway which did not contribute to being a dependable candidate to make restitution. It made no rhyme nor reason to chase after her. But with that said, Wyatt pursued the girl while Lucy tended to the animals and farm. It was a helluva chase. Like trying to catch the wind.

With no love lost between the two, fate would see that their paths would cross again. For Wyatt there was no turning back. Blinded by revenge, it was time to pay up or face the ultimate consequences. A shattering twist had unknowingly awaited them. They had temporarily resigned themselves to form an unholy alliance. In the midst of a drug trade, they had walked into a gangland ambush. Battled bloody and outnumbered, they watched their comrades drop one by one. Finally in the end it came down to just the two of them facing off against terrible odds. Time and bullets were running out.

My thanks to NetGalley and Arcade Publishing / Skyhorse Publishing for this ARC in exchange for an unbiased review.

Marialyce says

3 I should have know this book was not for me stars

I should have know that since this book has been compared to those of Cormac McCarthy that is would not be for me. I should have known when it stated that it was gritty, another word for lots of violence that it wasn't for me. I should have known that since this was a contemporary Western novel, a genre that I don't do well with, that this book was just not for me. However, I persevered probably because the prose written was quite extraordinary and the story line which had hints of incest and life in an environment so rough and tumble that it blocked out any semblance of a life I knew, could make me comprehend better the nature of some that drive them to violence and death.

Wyatt and Lucy twins, raised by their father, develop an extremely close relationship. They are one with each other always for I am you and you are me. When one morning Wyatt discovers that one of his steers has been fatally shot he decides to chase the shooter, a young teenage girl. In a shootout more of his herd is killed and Wyatt and the girl both wounded begin a cat and mouse chase through the west that is comprised of dangerous motorcycle gangs, meth labs, and marauding coyotes. This becomes a fevered dream of failed lost hope and unfulfilled desires.

I wished I had liked it better, although for many this will be a novel that focuses on the underbelly of what passes for society that is hidden, malevolent and violent.

Thanks you to Rae DelBianco, Skyhorse Publishing and NetGalley for an advanced copy of this book to be published on June 5,2018

Alisa Ellie says

“The only way to influence another’s fate is by destroying them. It’s the only thing that can be done permanently and by an action within your control. To try to protect someone is to try to intervene in the actions of the world against them but that’s something you

can't face alone or entirely because if fate has bullets for them you can only take one."

Rough Animals is precisely an excellent example of how a powerful new voice shapes the formidable novel. The story is written so ably that I'd never thought it's a debut novel. The beauty of narration is murderous. It's a deadly weapon in Rae's arms, and she gladly carries the bloodshed not only on the pages of her novel but makes the reader bleeding with her narrative style in such an elegant and neat way. A couple of comparisons almost killed me with their beauty. It's the book I envy I didn't write by myself. I'm not so gifted tho.

I feel Rae's love for classics through the pages of Rough Animals. I know she's been compared to Denis Johnson and Cormac McCarthy and it's a well-deserved statement. Moreover, she managed to create the spirit of romanticism for the rural life throughout the story full of violence, death, revenge, battles, and guns.

The story is hard to put down. In spite of the blood and murder flows with an endless stream, Rae spares a room for a vital message which is adroitly tangled into the wise plot and is revealed only at the very end that makes the jaw drop. It's the book that will never be forgotten after once read. Profoundly embedded in my reader's mind, Rough Animals possesses the ability to surprise, causes the potent dependence and evokes the desire to be read once more. I have a premonition that it'll be one of the most-talked-about books this year.

With Rough Animals, Rae proved herself as the author whose books I definitely will collect in my library. Highly recommended and mark my word, you'll hear not once about this work of the imagination and twisted mind.

Rae provided me with the ARC of Rough Animals, but it's in no way manipulated my opinion. I'm honest in my statements.

Angela M says

This is gritty, violent, bloody and not exactly what I usually read, but it also has beautiful thick prose that I had to read slowly at times and a story that grabbed a hold of me from the beginning even though it took a while to discover motivations. Twins Wyatt and Lucy Smith have enough cattle to barely pay the mortgage and keep the family land. Five years after their father's death, which we are told was accidental, some cattle are killed, enough of a loss to jeopardize their meager livelihood. Before you know it, Wyatt is on a chase for the young girl who killed the cattle and remains a mystery to him until the chase takes him into the middle of the dealings of a drug cartel . Could a not quite teen age girl be this dangerous, this involved? What lengths would Wyatt go to in order to recover the loss? I was amazed to see ! In between the narrative of his journey, there are flashbacks to his childhood and as the journey progresses, so much of the past is revealed.

If you are sensitive to the violence this may not be for you. If it wasn't for my friend Elyse's fabulous review, (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>) I may not have read this. So thanks, Elyse ! In spite of my discomfort and not usually enjoying books with this kind of a chase, this much suspense, I found so much more of a story here than I expected and I can't give it less than 4 stars.

I received an advanced copy of this book from Arcade Publishing through Edelweiss.

Sharon Metcalf says

More than once I stopped to question what I was doing reading *Rough Animals* - filled as it was with hardship, graphic violence, drug deals and death. The answer each time? Unquestionably, the writing. Young author Rae DelBianco fashioned her story with intelligent, thought provoking and marvellously descriptive writing. Words, not beautiful or flowery but gritty and coarse, completely suited to the Utah desert setting. How many beautiful descriptions of sunsets have I read over the years but never have I seen nightfall described this way *The sky was fanning with darkness like gangrene spreading....* and yet in the context it was utterly perfect.

Right from the outset I was intrigued about the characters history but also their future prospects. The random shooting of their livestock likely meant they'd lose their ranch. I could feel their desperation. DelBianco managed to simultaneously repulse me and extract my sympathy with her words. The lengths taken to wrest recompense for what was taken from them was extreme and this was a study in "the pain of having to kill to survive".

I daresay this author has a sparkling career ahead of her if this debut is any indication. My congratulations to her and my thanks to Skyhorse Publishing and NetGalley for the digital review copy received in exchange for an honest review.

Bonnie Brody says

Rae Delbianco has an inimitable voice all her own. Though some of the author blurbs compare her to other novelists, I found her to be a poetic voice in the wilderness, both literally and figuratively. Ms. Delbianco is able to take horrific scenes and make your heart weep. She is able to write about things seemingly mundane and make you feel that you'll never experience them the same way again. That this is a debut novel is difficult to believe. The author writes with a surety and wisdom that belies her young age.

Twenty-three year old Wyatt Smih and his twin sister Lucy live on an isolated ranch in Box Elder, Utah. The ranch is barely making it and when Wyatt discovers that some of his cattle have been killed, he goes after the person responsible. He is appalled that whoever shot his cattle has even eaten some of it raw. When he finds the killer a gun battle ensues and he is shot in his arm. He prevails however and is aghast when he discovers that she is a girl, a wild child, almost feral. The cost of his lost cattle is \$4600 and Wyatt needs this money or he will lose the ranch. The girl says she doesn't have it but after Wyatt's aggressive determination, she tells him she knows where to find it. Thus begins a trek from hell to get the money.

Wyatt and his twin Lucy are very close, so close that "they weren't twins, they weren't two, they were fire. And a thing without edges". Their father has been dead for six years and is referred to, throughout the book as 'the father'. Lucy has told Wyatt that while hunting she inadvertently shot the father, thinking he was an elk. "What to do when the father was gone and they were too young but had been born old and youth had been nothing but a season in which calves were new and then butchered the next fall." Wyatt struggles with his vision as he only has one eye, the other lost in an accident that occurred years ago.

As Wyatt follows the wild girl across the desert, he learns the meaning of violence, of killing. He understands self-preservation and watches carefully those who know nothing about caring for others. He learns to survive by means he would never have dreamed of, hovering between life and death, viewing himself with a new eye. He wondered, "if you died would you take the violence you've committed with you or would it remain as a scar upon the earth". For Wyatt has now become a killer, fighting those who would

keep him from getting his \$4600, fighting elements that care nothing for his life, fighting so that he can return to Lucy who he'd never been away from before.

Throughout the book I wondered about 'the father' and hypothesized many a scenario. As the novel traveled back and forth from Wyatt's physical journey to his internal one, the reader is fully caught up in what he experiences in the here and now and his life with Lucy. The girl is a puzzle, a piece of life that seems to have been loaned from Dante's inferno and the league of fallen angels all at once. I thought of her as a psychopathic Wonder Woman.

This book is sure to make my top ten of the year. Ms. Delbianco has a dark, poetic vision, one that does not inspire hope but never loses sight of connection and following your north star.

Elyse says

A huge thank you to Bonnie Brody!!!! Her review gave me chills.
I don't gravitate toward westerns...but I can't endorse this book highly enough. It's one of the best books I've read this year.

The writing is an sensational experience!
The characters with blood and death being a constant threat— death a personal memory- injuries- running - fiercely tearing of limbs - gutting with teeth- avoiding another man's trigger- dying too much like cattle— battling the elements—
thunderstorms—
lightening—
are so deeply in your thoughts.... characters so real ... they are a part of you —best book friends forever.

Nothing I can write will do justice to this book. It's an experience like no other... a journey that continues to explode page after page.

Wyatt and Lucy Smith - (twins) - their father - and the mysterious wild child...
will support you through this journey. I didn't even hesitate whether or not I could handle the fighting - the blood- the hell- because the characters
we're so compelling and heartfelt- I wanted to be where they were. If they were facing danger - I was going with them.

“Out here the wind could come like something four-legged, like something plodding in drafted rhythm under an ox's yoke, or it could come like an ocean, a body that, if it had still waters, they were beyond your reach and not what you were made to breathe. If it were like an ocean tonight perhaps the girl would be washed away come morning, washed away with the whole history of it all and his tracking out here and his forefathers footsteps across it years before alongside those of however many of the mules had made it this far into the journey. And if he woke early enough to still see the bloodstain in the sand where she'd lain, Then a few more rushes of wind would surely take that away as well, and then you could go home. You could go home, and it would not be like it had never happened, but in not being able to see it anymore it was still as if something had been undone”.

There were phenomenal sentences to highlight on every page that I finally just stopped trying to hold on too tightly- and just surrendered to the books flow. It was incredible to do that.
It's very hard to believe that this is a debut..., 'can't possibly be'. This writer has skills and skills and skills!!!

I'll be surprised if the film people aren't coming after Rae DelBianco already.

It's soooo visual.

Everything is 'enhanced' as if on steroids....

sights, smells, temperatures, inner grabbling with issues between right and wrong...moral choices...

It's brutal - beautiful- with sweetly tender moments.

Thank You Skyhorse Publishing, Arcade Publishing, Netgalley,
and Rae DelBisnco

Kath ? novelandfolk says

I was so lucky to have the chance to read this one early (thanks so much for sending me a copy, Rae!) and let me tell you, it reached out of the pages and grabbed my undying attention from the very first scene and I could hardly look away from then on. Somehow Rae has woven a gritty, desperate chase of a story through with a surprisingly thoughtful outlook on the push/pull of human violence and guilt along with achingly beautiful and evocative writing.

So listen up: Rae DelBianco is a strong new voice in the book community right out of the gate and you won't want to miss this perfect summer read!

Jill says

am not a Cormac McCarthy fan but sometimes I surprise myself. For example, I very much enjoyed Sisters Brothers, The Fourth of July Creek (Smith Henderson) and The Sons (Phil Meyer). The advance reviews of Rough Animals were so strong that I decided to give this book a chance.

But I found out it wasn't really for me. The writing is very strong with wonderful, fully fleshed out word-images and I have no doubt this author has what it takes to be a real contender. The plot -- a man named Wyatt Smith who, along with his twin sister, tends to the family's isolated Utah ranch and barely scrapes by, until a girl barely into her teens shows up and kills some of their cattle—along with their hopes of financial survival. The journey into the desert, along with the ensuing recognition of who he really is, provides an almost mythical overlay to the story.

Those who enjoy Mr. McCarthy's writing or modern Westerns, will surely find Rough Animals to be enormously gratifying. Unfortunately, I am not the right reader.

Elizabeth Sagan says

Rough Animals is the kind of book that makes you realise how beautiful language can be and how someone with the right kind of talent can say even the most mundane things in a jaw-dropping manner. I would never have guessed this is a debut novel.

*

I have so many quotes to share! But the thing is, they aren't the kind of quotes that mean something

particularly, they are just BEAUTIFULLY written.

*

Just take a look at this. *The sky was melting from black to clouded gray, like an exhaust pipe being wiped clean.* How much sense this one can make! Yet who would have written (thought about) it like this?!

*

Or: *He killed on this land like a duty, and perhaps it was the land itself that did the killing, growing all of them only to eat, swallowing without chewing, and eating their house in bites of sinking peat and snatches of mold.*

*

Two other authors gave me this feeling – Cormac McCarthy with *The Road* and Patrick Rothfuss with *The Name of The Wind* series. Every sentence was nurtured until it was absolutely perfect. And what is clearly after reading *Rough Animals* is that Rae DelBianco can write. This book kept me loyal even though I have read it in a quite busy period of my life and never once have I thought about giving it up. It was the perfect refuge after a crazy day, even if it meant reading only 10 pages before falling asleep. The dialogue was beautiful, simple, raw. For some reason *Rough Animals* reminded me of *The Gunslinger* – it was the same unforgiving word. Moreover, when I was two chapters in, I realised that those kind of brilliant sentences are repeating too often and it would have been a shame to not write them down. So I started the book again, this time underlining them.

*

Some of them might not tell you anything, but every single one of them made me mutter “wow”.

*

He had not bled like this before and with it came the shattering understanding of the body as a machine, the warm sludge running down like oil and with it flecks of canvas jacket, the casing for the mechanism.

*

By the time they emerged into the field the cattle has begun to bellow, as if death was intangible until the puffs of flies began to swell.

*

The girl stumbled with her head down and the dirty strands of hair fallen over her face, like the heavy veins of a dark disease.

*

Behind it a cameo of the father that had come before an one of the father before that, who had come from the East and into the desert, exploring too late for adventure but too early for towns or civilization, so that life for his descendants was a series of unremarkable struggles against nature with neither triumph nor end.

*

And he was pulling the trigger like she had pulled the trigger and she had broken them apart but he had too and the blood, all that blood had always been there, and you had to take it even if it was broken, even if it was wrong and half gone, because that was what was yours.

*

I'll stop here because honestly this book is filled with sentences like these and I could write them all in this review, but then the review would be super long.

All in all *Rough Animals* was such a good surprise and I can't wait to read more from Rae DelBianco.

Zoeytron says

Copy furnished by Net Galley for the price of a review.

You don't want to mess with folks from Box Elder County out there in Utah, where even the young are born old. Harken to the lowing of the cattle and the rhythmic thrum of the cicadas. Off aways, there lies the desert, dead quiet, prickling in its silence. Make no mistake, this tale is vivid and visceral, gritty and gut wrenching.

You are going to want to keep an **eye** on this new author. The images she creates with her words will come alive in your mind. Big thanks to Elyse, who called this novel to my attention.

Fran says

Twins Wyatt and Lucy Smith could not be more devoted to each other. Five years ago, their lives drastically changed when Lucy went hunting with father and mistook him for an elk. Wyatt never faulted Lucy but still she "snapped". Now, she seems unaffected by the struggle created by this misfortune. By the tender age of twenty three years, the storms of life were already etched on Wyatt's face. Working their cattle ranch in Box Elder County, Utah, foreclosure seemed likely when a mud covered feral girl, wielding a TEC 9 and a shotgun, killed several steer and injured Wyatt's upper arm.

Knowledge of the forest and a barefoot, silent approach enabled Wyatt, despite his blood soaked arm, to catch the girl. He tied her to a chair, the only piece of furniture in Lucy's bedroom. The loss of these steer signaled the loss of the ranch...unless...\$4,600 could be raised. When the girl escaped by breaking a window, Wyatt left the ranch in Lucy's care determined to find the girl and demand what was owed for the cattle.

Wyatt started his search, by truck, heading toward Salt Lake City, Utah. He tracked her by smelling the air, pursuing her the way he would hunt for an animal. In his attempt for restitution, Wyatt and the unnamed girl encountered outlaw bikers, meth labs, drug cartels, and coyotes. Often violent gunfire from rivals ensued. Wyatt and the girl "dance" between friend or foe status. He thinks of home in Box Elder County through flashbacks. Interspersed throughout, we witness childhood lessons in the harsh realities of nature and survival as presented to Wyatt and Lucy by their father.

Wyatt's brutal journey of revenge and retribution was unexpected. It was cruel and devastating. The roughness, however, was tempered by the beautiful prose by debut author Rae DelBianco. This modern day western thriller was an intense read with bloody gunfights and hungry coyotes out for human blood. Clear your calendar, sit down, read and enjoy "Rough Animals" by Rae DelBianco. I definitely did!

Thank you Arcade/ Skyhorse Publishing and Net Galley for the opportunity to read and review "Rough Animals".

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

It took me a while to get through this book and I will try to sort out why. First I should say I am acquainted with the author in social media and really love her artistic sensibilities and her love for literature.

I think what I love in literature is different from what she loves in literature, so it is more that her book is not a match for my reading tastes. She posts frequently about Cormac McCarthy, Denis Johnson, and John Steinbeck. And this is western through and through, although the setting is more modern than many westerns. Set in Utah, in a landscape open and bleak enough that it is easy to imagine lawlessness. The characters are young, tough, and have to be willing to risk everything to survive; there is still an underlying sense that they might not. The stakes are high.

I really connected to the story in the beginning, where the twins who are barely scraping by on the family ranch without their parents, and their cattle have been killed. They discover a girl who is the shooter, take her hostage, she escapes, and shenanigans ensue. This is also where I found myself disconnecting from the story,

which seemed to turn into a series of shootups and drug dealings and bodily injury. It was hard to tell which moment was the most climactic moment. It felt like an action film, where the whole point is the explosions and fight sequences - these are the movies I never watch. So as you can see, this just isn't the book for me. I wanted to go back to the sad family story, and the twins survival, but more in the emotional longterm sense, less in the immediate gunslinger sense. I unfortunately found myself skimming through those parts, and they made up a large portion of the book. (I should have known this wouldn't be for me!)

I do love that we are seeing this new wave of westerns, from the alternate hippos of Sarah Gailey to the historical explorations of Carys Davies to the brutal setting of Western Australia in Tim Winton's work. I feel like readers who hook into this movement will also enjoy this book.

Thanks to the publisher and author for providing access to this title through NetGalley. It came out June 5th.
