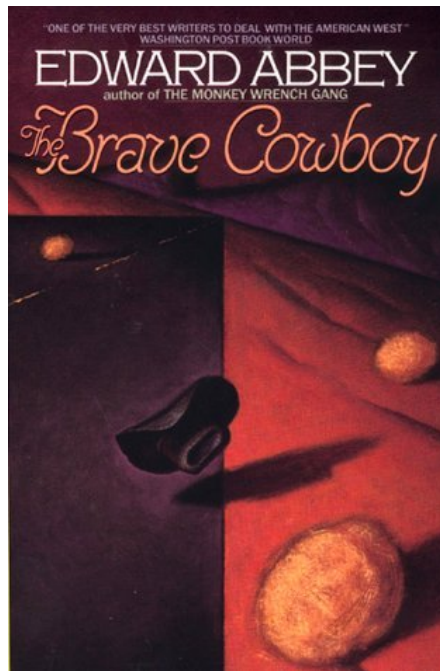




The Brave Cowboy: An Old Tale in a New Time

Edward Abbey

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Jack Burnes is a loner at odds with modern civilization. A man out of time, he rides a feisty chestnut mare across the New West — a once beautiful land smothered beneath airstrips and superhighways. And he lives by a personal code of ethics that sets him on a collision course with the keepers of law and order. Now he has stepped over the line by breaking one too many of society's rules. The hounds of justice are hot in his trail. But Burnes would rather die than spend even a single night behind bars. And they have to catch him first.

The Brave Cowboy: An Old Tale in a New Time Details

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From Reader Review The Brave Cowboy: An Old Tale in a New Time for online ebook

Eugene Miya says

I saw the B&W film "Lonely Are the Brave" more than a decade before I heard the name Edward Abbey. Kirk Douglas wrote that this was his favorite film, ever. If one needs a comparison name it's Cowboys meet the Modern World. The film started not only Douglas but Bill Bixby (My Favorite Martian), Walter Matthau, George Kennedy, Gena Rowlands, Carroll O'Connor (Archie Bunker) as the truck driver with an ending the only Ed could write and one Ed Abbey as a police man/deputy, oh and the Sandia Mountains and the city of Albuquerque (renamed Duke City). Some cowboys rebel, other cowboys, like the sheriff, reluctantly blended in.

This story is not for every one, especially city folk.

Both the film and the book have characters who spent time in Abbey's other books. Unlike many writings and sequels, the characters evolved (e.g., the General appears as a Colonel in an earlier story). Does John W. Burns reappear? The Hayduke fans certainly think so. I don't want to spoil it by revealing all the character names.

Read the book and see the movie.

Monty says

I grabbed this new edition when I learned it was written by Edward Abbey. I read The Monkeywrench Gang decades ago when I was a rebellious teen who had friends working for Greenpeace. The plot and characters were quite engaging.

Jack Burns is equally interesting, if not more so. Here is the last cowboy, doing his damndest to live off the grid and maintain a lifestyle and worldview that only exists in Western movies and books. He lives by the "Code"--meaning an internal moral and ethical integrity that is solid as rock. This does not translate into "legal" or "law abiding" when his code comes into conflict with the latter. It has been years since I saw the movie based on the book, "Lonely are the Brave" with Kirk Douglas. I have since learned that this was Kirk Douglas's favorite film. With this book, Abbey reminds me a bit of Ken Kesey and Ernest Hemingway. It also demonstrates to me that Abbey was more than a little bit of a "friendly anarchist."

Still says

I'm stunned.

I have seen the movie at least a dozen times since I was 15 but I lived through this book.

There is a majestic poetry throughout this book.

The descriptions of the New Mexico landscape give the desert, the mountains, the rocks and sand a sanctity not afforded human beings.

Abbey has a reverence for the parts of America remote and untainted by the touch of man.

"The Cowboy" - John W. Burns or "Jack" to his friends - is too noble for this world. An anachronism, living life as a cowboy during a time when there are few ranches still owned by individuals as opposed to corporations.

The law and the square johns view "The Cowboy" as an anarchist. A commie. A "Red". A danger to the American society of the 1950s, when this book was written and first published.

When he comes down from the mountains where he's been working as a sheep-herder, because where else can a man find a ranch to cowboy in modern America? - it's to check on the welfare of the wife ("Jerry") and child ("Seth") of a long-time friend who's been imprisoned for refusing to sign up for the draft. He discovers that his friend is being held in the county jail near his home before being transferred to a federal prison when there is available space. "The Cowboy's" friend, "Paul", is a professor and self-professed anarchist -in political thought only. He's a dreamy-eyed philosopher with lofty notions, physically incapable of committing one act of actual anarchy.

"The Cowboy" decides that he has to break into the jail in order to free his friend "Paul". So he goes to a bar, gets drunk, and gets into a brawl with a one-armed man.

To reveal much more would spoil the joys to be found in this fast paced, action-filled novel.

This was a haunting read for me.

Long a fan of the superb film based on this novel, much was lost in the adaptation.

This is one of the greatest novels I'll ever read.

Highest possible recommendation.

Michael says

Never doubt the universality of the basic premise here--there is inescapable tension between the needs of the individual and the requirements of living in relationship.

The plot elements are well-conceived; it's a great story. The setting is spectacular, colorful, rich, a character all its own, described in detail.

Unhappily, Abbey has a greater feel for the character of the place than he has for the character of the people. The story bogs down because the focus constantly shifts away from the human element, into the physical world or into the philosophic world.

These shortcomings were overcome and put in clear relief with the coming of a writer and film production team that understood the need for keeping the focus on people. *Lonely Are the Brave* is far the superior presentation of Abbey's ideas.

This having been said, if the reader can be patient, willing to skip ahead through wordy passage of description, this is a rewarding read. The power of the story and of its ending lingers long after the book is closed.

Randy McBride says

I read a large number of books, and this is among the best. The world is changing around Jack Burns, a good hearted cowboy that is out of step with the world. The Kirk Douglas movie Lonely Are the Brave follows the book fairly close. Warning though, it is not a feel good book.

Kent says

Basis for the movie Lonely are the Brave. Jack Burns, the anachronism, travels to town to break his buddy out of jail. Unfortunately this is mid-20th century Albuquerque, and cowboys breaking their buddies out of jail just don't have much luck. His friend is in for helping illegal immigrants - not a typical cowboy crime. Jack remains true to the code that says you stick with your buddies and family to the end, tries breaking his friend out, fails, and then runs for the hills and Mexico beyond. That's where the truck load-full of toilets comes into the story.

Susan Klinke says

I like the idea of the book better than Abbey's execution of it. I much prefer Abbey when he straightforwardly philosophizes about life and the modern world or when he writes about the landscape and his experience of it. Much less well do I like when he writes about people, fictional or otherwise. I just don't think he is nearly as observant of, moved by, or sensitive to people as he is by the land, ideas, or his own experience.

Abbey's characters in the Brave Cowboy, while interesting, are not fully realized and feel a little one-dimensional. They seem mostly to be just vehicles for Abbey's ideas. The dialogue between characters is not that great either. It feels somewhat stiff and not natural or nuanced enough. That being said, the characters of Jack Burns, Paul Bondi, and Jerry Bondi did not seem typical for a western, and were an unexpected and happy surprise.

Jack Burns, the main character, and the most fully realized character, is a self-professed anarchist who likes to live life on his own terms rather than society's. This does not mean that he is without morals. It's just that his morals are often at odds with those of society. He feels out of place in modern civilization, and prefers living in the wilderness with his horse Whisky. I found the following excerpt one of the better pieces of writing in the book. It is taken from a time when Jack is in a canyon shortly after he escapes from jail. It gives a very good sense of Jack Burns and of why he prefers to live the way he does:

"Burns felt eager, hungry, intensely aware of every shade, sound, smell, and movement in his environment; a keen convergence of his powers and intentions made each step seem vital, made the actions of his limbs consensual with the purpose in his mind. For the first time in nearly two days and nights he felt himself to be a whole and living creature, a man again and not a derelict stumbling through a mechanical world he could not understand."

Jack's friend, Paul Bondi, is in jail for refusing to sign up for Selective Service. His refusal was due to his belief that compulsory military service is a form of slavery. Even though he engaged in this bit of civil disobedience, he considers himself to be a good citizen. Jack tries to break him out of jail, but while Paul is somewhat tempted by Jack's "romantic" notions, he ultimately believes in serving his time. Paul is married and has a son, is educated with a philosophy degree, and wants to go to graduate school as well as serve on the school board some day. Being on the run would not be conducive to being a good husband and father or accomplishing the goals he has set for himself.

Jerry, Paul Bondi's wife, is an abstract painter. She has a lesser part, but her unusual pastime for a character in a western, no less a female character in a western, adds another interesting dimension in this not so typical western.

I saw the movie, Lonely are the Brave, which was based on The Brave Cowboy, before I read the book. It is a case in which I liked the movie better than the book. I think this is perhaps because the somewhat one-dimensionality of the characters in the book was able to be more fleshed out by the actors in the movie. There are some differences between the book and the movie. A notable one is that in the movie Paul Bondi is in jail for smuggling Mexicans across the border instead of refusing to register for Selective Service.

As an aside, I learned from the book that Dexedrine (aka Speed) looks to have readily available in 1950's cafes to weary truck drivers.

Rebecca Gregory says

Edward Abbey could describe a moment so well, I really feel like I am in it.

Rick Bavera says

A "western" that is out-of-the-norm for me: I actually liked it. Maybe in part because I enjoy the writings of Edward Abbey, who was originally from a little town in Western Pennsylvania near where I live. The name of the town: Home, PA

Anyway: The story of a modern-day cowboy (the book was written in the 1950s) who likes the wide open spaces, and doesn't like government.

The cowboy "breaks into" jail (commits a "crime" and gets arrested) so that he can break himself and a friend (who is in jail already) out of jail.

They file through one of the bars on the window, but his friend won't leave. Our cowboy leaves anyway, and is chased by the law over half of the Albuquerque area. He escapes, or we think he does. But you will have to read the book to find out.

Marianne Dufour says

Rather slow, painful descent into hopelessness - for the reader that is, as the main character never gives up. I found the book way too accurately depressing to enjoy it - like someone sticking a finger in a core wound.

Patrick says

Edward Abbey writes a fine story about the cowboy Edward Burns and his loathing of government and the

restrictions that law places on man's free will. Taking place in the New Mexican desert, the tale follows Burns' purposeful arrest, his attempt to spring his companion from the clink, his own subsequent escape and the chase that the law gives him into the mountains, where he eventually evades his pursuers and...well, you're just going to have to read to find out. 4 stars because, even though I love all things Abbey, the ending really pissed me off (cue Cartman).

Mike says

I loved this one. Kept it to read again. Abbey has a cool style.

Lea says

A story only Abbey could tell. Written in his lyrical prose, with long descriptions of the natural world in the Southwest. An odd story about a cowboy avoiding/resisting the government and civilization. I wouldn't recommend it as your first Abbey fiction but for fans of his.

Theleem says

I don't know if this is sacrilege, but I found this book to be much more well-written than The Monkeywrench Gang, and with a clearer and less heavy-handed message. The plot was almost excessively simple but enjoyable, and the characters here seemed a bit less goofy than in TMG, and as usual Abbey's love of all things natural comes through in the best way possible.

Erica says

I read this in the cutest old western edition (thanks Steve!). And it's a cute old western. Except written by Edward Abbey, and so has a loveably heavy handed ending relating to the demise of the American west, and a certain kind of man. The characters are all fully told, which is refreshing in a chase novel.

Jared says

Eh, I've loved Abbey books, both fiction and non- but this one was lacking the gritty humor and brazen environmentalism I'm use to. Barely finished it, and the ending was tragic but predictable.

Dayamati Hayes says

Abbey wrote his MA thesis on the topic of justifications of violence in the anarchist movement. The philosophy department at University of New Mexico awarded him the MA in 1956. Abbey spent the rest of his life working on the theme of his thesis. The theme of independent men trying to live in a world being

undermined by corporate greed and dim-witted governance appears in this novel no less than in "Fire on the Mountain" and "The Monkey Wrench Gang." As in all his writing, the vivid descriptions of New Mexican terrain make this novel as beautifully poetic as it is politically astute.

Maya Day says

I'm thoroughly surprised I got through this book omg it's so monotonous which surprised me cuz it's Ed Abbey and it's about an anarchist cowboy?? And like I know I should take in account that it was published in 1956 but it was absurdly racist and the boring plot wouldn't let me overlook that so... I did like parts of it and still like Abbey as an author but it was overall disappointing and cheesy like.. Wow. Hard to get through.

Abigail Kirby says

I enjoyed the story, but there was too much emphasis on descriptions and not enough on the actual building of the character. There were a lot of details that seemed irrelevant and confused the reader instead of aided in understanding. It is a sad hero's journey that I feel is a grand farewell to the age of cowboys.

Nicholle says

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