



# The Unforgiven

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## **The Unforgiven** Alan LeMay

In this epic American novel, which served as the basis for the classic film directed by John Huston, a family is torn apart when an old enemy starts a vicious rumor that sets the range aflame.

## **The Unforgiven Details**

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Author : Alan LeMay

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## From Reader Review The Unforgiven for online ebook

### Sam Sattler says

Alan LeMay, even if he had written nothing else, would be long remembered as a very fine writer of western novels because of his two best: *The Searchers* and *The Unforgiven*. *The Searchers*, of course, was made into a much loved John Wayne movie, and in 1960 *The Unforgiven* was made into a film starring Burt Lancaster and Audrey Hepburn. Both the book and film versions of *The Unforgiven* are somewhat overshadowed by those of *The Searchers*, but, in a way, their stories are almost mirror images of each other.

In *The Searchers*, a white child has been stolen by Indians and her family is determined to rescue the young woman from the "savages." In *The Unforgiven*, a Kiowa child has been stolen by a white family, and when the Indians learn the origin of the young woman, they demand her return to the tribe. Both books focus heavily on the racial prejudice that was so commonly inflicted upon American Indians by the very people determined to steal their homelands from them. The resulting conflict was both brutal and bloody, with atrocities perpetrated by both sides. What makes LeMay's writing special, is that he gives equal weight to both points-of-view.

The Zachary family has come to Texas for a new beginning and they are determined to hang onto their land and the way of life they have carved out for themselves. Now, however, because of the drowning of the family patriarch on a recent cattle drive, they must look to Ben, the eldest of three brothers and one sister, for the leadership their father used to provide. Ben proves himself to be a competent enough ranch manager, but when an old family nemesis shows up and begins spreading rumors about the Zachary daughter, things take an ugly turn.

Soon, the leaders of a group of Kiowa warriors that raids this part of the Texas territory with the coming of each full moon begins scouting the ranch in order to get a closer look at the girl they suspect might be a baby lost to the tribe years earlier. And if the Kiowa decide that the young woman belongs to them, the Zacharys know that they will fight to the death to bring her home to the tribe.

Most westerns written in the 1950s were closer to the pulp westerns of the late-1800s than to serious western fiction. Alan LeMay's work is one exception to the rule. LeMay's *The Unforgiven* can, in fact, be called a "literary novel," and he spends as much time here developing his Kiowa characters as he does his main white characters. By looking at the conflict through two very different sets of eyes, what the author describes at the novel's climax feels both inevitable and tragic. In the real world of post-Civil War Texas, it was unlikely to end any other way.

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### Exanimis says

There is a secret within the Zachary family, their only daughter, Rachael, may be of Kiowa blood. With neighbors ready to tell the tale and accusing the Zachary's of being "Indian Lovers" and War chiefs within the Kiowa nation ready to take back what is theirs, Rachael and her family must face the past and survive the future.

I can see why this was made into a movie, it's a fantastic story and I rate it among the best I have ever read.

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## Craig says

The Unforgiven is a very intense and powerful book set in the rugged Texas panhandle (circa 1874). Central to the plot is the Zachary family: mother "Tilda" (worn down mentally), oldest brother Ben and surrogate father (24 years of age - the father, Zach, had drowned four years before in a river cattle crossing), brother Cash (21 years), sister Rachael (17 years) and Andy (16 years). The family are ranchers striving to eke out a living. Rachel is not the biological child of Zach and Tilda, but was found on the plains as a baby. Her parentage is questionable, whether white, Indian or of mixed race is unknown. Rachel is not aware of this and is very much an integral sibling in the family. The narrative focuses on Rachel, race relations (whites and the marauding Kiowas), cattle ranching on the Texas plains in the late 1800s, and more. I was particularly impressed with the writing style of Alan LeMay. He is a powerful, intense writer, adept at infusing in the dialogue the Western vernacular of this era. The cowboy slang, emotive expressions, and compelling metaphors, coupled with the lack of proper grammar extant in the southwest at this time and place (yet sometimes even more expressive than the King's English), made the narrative beautifully eloquent. The action was harsh and gritty yet the author never stooped to exploitation or sensationalism. I just finished LeMay's "The Searchers" and was so impressed I decided to read more of his works. I was not disappointed with "The Unforgiven." I have read many of L'Amour's Westerns and considered him the consummate spinner of Western yarns. After reading "The Searchers" and "The Unforgiven", I have come to view L'Amour as LeMay-lite.

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## Chrissie says

Going into this novel, I wasn't sure what to expect. I'm familiar with the movie version of The Searchers, starring John Wayne, but I had not read the novel. Neither had I read this book, nor seen its movie incarnation. A while back, I came across it on Amazon and added it to my Watchlist to get to sometime in the future. Then good ole Amazon, thought enough to recommend the book to me, which is available for borrowing, free for Prime users. So, I thought I'd tackle the book first.

Given the extremely short summary here, I actually wasn't sure what the novel was actually about. So, from the back cover of the Kindle edition I read:

*The Texas Panhandle was a harsh and unforgiving place, but the Zachary family managed to get by. Until their world was upended by an old enemy who started a vicious rumor about the true identity of beautiful seventeen-year-old Rachel Zachary. Now their neighbors want her dead, and a band of Kiowa warriors are out to claim her for their own. There's only one man who will stand up for her. But in protecting Rachel, he might just be signing his own death warrant.*

While I wasn't blown away, and there are a few flaws in the novel, I still enjoyed this tale at least as much as I had anticipated. LeMay has a **delicious cadence** in his narration. The words and rhythms are beautiful at times and gentle, yet insistent. They are neither overly poetic nor gratingly starchy.

*Under the ground and upon it and in the air, every winter-deadened thing awoke, turned young and eager; and human hearts rose singing in answer.*

However, some of the language does leave a lot to be desired. Namely the chosen derogatory term, so casually bandied about, makes it hard to concentrate while reading, or to avoid making a sour face. *Red nigger* is distasteful at best and horrific at least. There's so much weight with those two words joined

together that two entire races of people are slathered in the ugliness of it each and every time. There are, of course, novels where the racist terms within are there because the characters speak that way, or "because of the times" in which the novel is set, but the problem I have with the usage of such terms in this book is that they seem wholly out of place.

Throughout the book, there is hardly a curse word said, and—aside from the racist remarks—there's a quiet solemnity to the novel. Calm and capable. It's been said that the novel's purpose (and therefore the movie's, by extension) is to tackle racism and its effects. I cannot find that in this book. Yes, there is the opportunity to do so, but either the author barely scratched the surface, or the undertones are so quiet that you could do nothing but wonder what is actually being said about racism. Thus, this derogatory term when used, feels like its place is to shock and startle, which breaks up the momentum of the book altogether. **The story warrants neither such attempts at shock, nor does it require it.** The shock value is so extremely low here that I'd find it hard to recommend the book solely based on that truth.

The ending is rather stunted in actuality, and seems like an entire chapter was lopped off the end. In fact, to fully explore seemingly deep-rooted, racist beliefs, this is the part of the novel to do so. As Rachel learns to fully explore her own truths, contrasted with what she had previously believed to be true, our grasp on her realness as a character loosens. The novel would've gained so much awareness had LeMay delved farther into this character alone. She and Ben both have **patchy and spotty character arcs**, and they are truly the only two who have them to begin with. The highlight of the book is actually the mother, Matthilda Zachary, and Georgia Rawlins. I think if a little more effort on LeMay's part had been applied to these two, and explored in more depth, the attempts at tackling racist beliefs of Native Americans and those of mixed race heritage would have proven more successful and in a greater and brighter light.

But, I do recognize some of that is a complex interpretation of trying to apply a 21st century view on a novel written in the mid-20th century which is set at the very beginning of the last quarter of the 19th century—post-Civil War, to further underscore the point. So, I shall give it some slack. Despite my lengthy points on its flaws, as I see them, the novel is actually well-written with some beautiful passages about life and the wild landscape of the Texas Panhandle in the early 1870s.

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### **Kevin Stilley says**

Excellent western writing.

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### **John says**

I thought the writing was very good, very authentic. The author has no problem bumping off major characters and in the end handles Rachael's origins in a very interesting way. I don't know if the author was reflecting the bigotry of 1957 or 1874 but it was a bit uncomfortable with the Kiowa being called non human, half human or "red niggers" - an expression I had never heard before. Not your typical western and even better than LeMay's "The Searchers"

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### **John McCormick says**

**Quality original Western story**

This is a quality original Western with some slight similarities to the author's acclaimed "The Searchers". Though those of you who like their western's full of action will be disappointed in some respects, but in others it certainly does not disappoint. Well written authentic with a real feel of time and place, as a family with a long held secret try to scratch a living raising cattle in the west, living in a tiny shack half buried in the earth, and heavily fortified against Indian attack. This the scene for a claustrophobic dramatic and exciting shootout climax.

Easy and enjoyable read with a slightly racist underlying theme.

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### **-kevin- says**

An emotionally challenging book. Very well written. Leaving all the heartache as implication rather than spelling it all out. Excellent accurate period data. Nicely done. I will probably seek out The Searchers.

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### **Hal Issen says**

This may appear to be a cowboy book but it is really a discussion of nature versus nurture: which factor has the greatest influence on our character: our biological ancestors, or the circumstances of our upbringing? The characters are complex and well-written, and the plot is interesting and intricate. I think it is fair in presenting how the US Government used the Army to violently invade Native American territory, encouraged economically disadvantaged whites to settle to expand the nation, and the resulting terrorism used by the Kiowas to try to retain the land. There are many instances of racist language used to illustrate the injustice committed against Native Americans, and some fairly graphic depictions of violent Kiowa terrorism; that may make it difficult for some to read. Most importantly, the author leaves it to the reader to figure out the condition of original sin, can a human be evil simply from the fact of being born, or do we become evil as a result of our thoughts, choices and actions?

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### **Elisabeth says**

Review to follow.

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### **Tom Ross says**

Doesn't quite measure up to The Searchers but still a good read. Brutal plot as Kiowas search for one of their own in the white man's world. Le May gets inside of the white characters' heads but makes no such attempt with the Indians and their motivations. I think maybe the limited narration hurt this story. Setting is Texas and beautifully painted with Le May's prose. The violence is intense, reminding me of Guthrie, McCarthy and McMurtry.

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### **Ed says**

First-rate realistic traditional Western set in 1874 along the Texas Panhandle. Full-fledged characters. I also

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liked the vivid details given about the cattle drives, life in a soddy house (not for me), and violent clashes with the Kiowas Indians. The novel's main strife pivots on the true identity of the 17-year-old Rachel Zachary who may or may not be of Kiowa blood. A rousing stand-off occurs at the climatic ending. A movie of the book was made starring Burt Lancaster and Audrey Hepburn, though I've never watched it.

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### **AndrewP says**

I had never heard of this author before, but I recognized the title from the old 1960's movie starring Burt Lancaster.

The first part of the book read a bit like 'Little House on the Prairie' but for adults. Lot's of small incidents that lead up to the big showdown at the end.

The story is basically a tale of betrayal and prejudice against a frontier family who's adopted daughter is suspected of being stolen from the local Kiowa tribe. Neither the Kiowa's, nor their neighbors appreciate that. It's interesting that this is the opposite of LeMay's other famous book 'The Searchers', in which an Indian girl is suspected of being an abducted white girl. This was also made into a famous movie, this time starring John Wayne.

Took a bit of getting into, but got progressively more interesting from the half way point on. I enjoyed it enough to try and track down a copy of 'The Searchers'.

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### **Van Roberts says**

This is quite simply an excellent western that surpasses ninety percent of all westerns. Nothing about Alan LeMay is contrived, and he presents a side of the frontier west that is both gritty and adventurous. He writes with far greater literary skill than one of my other favorite western writers Louis L'Amour, and he knows the west and lets his abundant knowledge filter through both the characters and the setting. Even if you don't like westerns because of their formulaic quality, you'll like LeMay because his work contains interesting, well-round characters and compelling predicaments. He imparts the wisdom that got certain frontiersmen through the worst of things--mainly the Native Americans who scalped white men, women, and children with the same disregard for life that you might skin a chicken. His prose is thoughtful and he doesn't shortchange you. You can learn a great deal about life on the frontier from this horse opera. Racism is the main theme of this western. A white family adopts a lost Indian girl and this show of compassion turns their fellow whites against them. The neighbors hate them because they believe that the Indians bypass their during their raids because they have taken in the girl. The girl, however, doesn't have a clue that she has been adopted, until an angry white threatens to reveal all about her.

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### **Marjorie says**

#### **Interesting story**

I enjoyed this story and I know both sides suffered, it left me hanging about the future. I can't trace my family on my father's side because of names not know. It is still a good read.

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