



A Hole in Texas

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With this rollicking novel-hailed equally for its satiric bite, its lightly borne scientific savvy, and its tender compassion for foible-prone humanity-one of America's preeminent storytellers returns to fiction. Guy Carpenter is a regular guy, a family man, an obscure NASA scientist, when he is jolted out of his quiet life and summoned to the corridors of power in Washington, D.C. Through a turn of events as unlikely as it is inevitable, Guy finds himself compromised by scandal and romance, hounded by Hollywood, and agonizingly alone at the white-hot center of a firestorm ignited as three potent forces of American culture--politics, big science, and the media--spectacularly collide.

A Hole in Texas Details

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From Reader Review A Hole in Texas for online ebook

Jan Rice says

I'm trying to figure out when I read this. Published 2005, Goodreads says, but copyright 2004, per the book itself. I had the hardcover which I bought after I found it remaindered in a Daedalus catalog and noticed who the author was. I thought the book was not up to his earlier standards when he was younger, *The Caine Mutiny*, for goodness sake, and *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*, which made a significant impression on me (both the books and the miniseries). Made sense, since he was in his late 80s at the time, right? On the other hand, some of his other books seemed dated to me when, on the basis of the ones I loved, I pursued them. For example, *Marjorie Morningstar* and *Youngblood Hawke*. I guess I read most of those books in the '80s, although *Winds of War* could have been earlier. and *The Caine Mutiny*, way before, so who knows if I'd have the same critical opinions of the two I then thought seemed dated. Maybe I should say *A Hole in Texas* isn't up to his *highest* standards.

Anyway, Herman Wouk has published another book now that he's 97 (!) years old. I just read a review of it. *The Lawgiver* It was on the basis of that that I looked for *A Hole in Texas*, and guess what? When I found it it had a 4x6 index card with my handwritten review. Why, I don't know. But it's a good thing, or otherwise I'd recall very little as it wasn't so memorable. But maybe it should have been. Here's my review, from circa 2005:

This story is about a 60-ish year old scientist. His significantly younger wife is jealous of an old college girlfriend. The girlfriend is a Chinese physicist. The scientist becomes suspected of treason and is caught up in a media circus. The context is the race to discover the Higgs boson, a theoretical particle. The book is really about how the US stopped supporting science. It is about cultural decay. It is a fun political thriller and romance, a little slow at 1st.

J. Travis Moger says

A Hole in Texas: A Novel by Herman Wouk**1/2

Though a reasonably entertaining read, Herman Wouk's *A Hole in Texas* was a disappointment. The premise was a good one: the Chinese discovery of the Higgs boson (aka "God particle") sets off a political brouhaha in Washington, DC, involving an American scientist suspected of passing secrets to his former lover in China. The Higgs boson had been the goal of the never completed Superconducting Super Collider, which Congress cancelled in 1993. Now Communists are again besting the USA, as the Russians had done fifty years earlier with Sputnik. Even worse, the Chinese might be developing a "Boson Bomb." Despite the book's explosive potential, it fizzled for me due to its painfully unnatural dialogue, improbable plot, and tidy ending. Not what I expect from a Pulitzer Prize-winning author. Two and a half stars.

S.E. White says

Interesting story -- another Wouk plot about the intricacies and difficulties of a marriage in connection with larger national issues.

Thanks to this book, I laughed at a joke I wouldn't have understood before reading it:

A Higgs boson walks into a Catholic church. The priest tells him that no bosons are allowed. "How can you have Mass without me?" the boson exclaims.

Stephen Gallup says

I'd like to think that, if the project I've been working on these many years sees the light of day and achieves a life of its own, and if I then turn my hand to fiction, that the result would be something like this novel.

What I mean is that, as a tech writer, I've spent a lot of time conveying detailed info in a way that is no more dry and yawn-inducing than absolutely necessary, and *A Hole in Texas* is written by someone with a great deal of understanding of particle physics, in addition to well formed opinions of how the U.S. Congress and popular media operate. It's informative -- and also riveting.

The story ties into a recent historical event, namely, the untimely demise of the Superconducting Super Collider project, killed by Congress in 1993 in favor of a far more costly but sexier competing endeavor. I know something about the SSC, as my work in the early 90s largely involved developing proposals and other marketing literature that attempted to shore up the DOE's interest in the thing. When the ax fell, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union brought an end to other government spending that was also important to my employer, things around me began unravelling very quickly.

Anyway, that's my background. If this is alternative history, it deviates from actual events only slightly. In this version, America's decision to abandon serious scientific inquiry prompted China to step in, and to the great chagrin of a former SSC physicist named Guy Carpenter, China apparently succeeds where America did not. The lead on the Chinese project happens to be a woman Guy knew rather well as a student at Cornell. Penny, Guy's wife of many decades, has always been unreasonably jealous of his first love, whose reappearance on the scene stirs up some poorly resolved issues between them.

The fortunes of Guy and Penny go through rather drastic swings, but at no point did anything feel contrived or unreasonable to me. Furthermore, I cared very much. I despaired when Guy did, and felt delighted for him every time his situation improved.

This is probably the first I've read of Herman Wouk. It won't be the last.

Anup Sinha says

It's a good tale with characters from interesting perspectives, but it's dialogue-driven to the extent the personalities are only paper-thin, speaking with almost the same voice. It reads much more like a screenplay script than it does a novel and that's kind of how I enjoyed it; I imagined it as a movie.

Herman Wouk is one of my all-time favorite writers; I'm familiar with his youthful ambitions for comedy writing and that is where this book comes from. It is a romp, sort of out of the mold of DON'T STOP THE

CARNIVAL or INSIDE, OUTSIDE, but not nearly as well-written.

I am a science teacher so I was intrigued that the main character Guy Carpenter was a physicist who'd worked on a super collider and that the plot centered around the discovery of the Higgs Boson. I enjoyed all of that and appreciated Wouk's effective research. But as I earlier alluded, the character development was nonexistent and the relationships were overly predictable and shallow. Don't read this book if human interest is what you're looking for, just read it for a tale about science and politics!

ThomasAD says

A light read, certainly, when compared to Winds of War or War and Remembrance.

Still, interesting subject matter. Not many books on physics are able to achieve such a light-hearted style. It reminded me of something by Neville Shute.

Bill says

A little dated, but this is a book that makes fun of Congress, Hollywood, Big Science, and the Press. It is a nice book, and Wouk spins a good yarn.

Brian Meadows says

It has been many years since I read anything by Herman Wouk. I read one in high school that was on the reading list - either *Winds of War* or *Caine Mutiny*. That was a long time ago. *A Hole In Texas* is quite different in that it is a novel about the latest forefront in nuclear science. That speaks well of his flexibility and breadth. It would have taken a good deal of research and keeping up with current news on the part of Wouk in his senior years. It was an enjoyable novel.

ray kahler says

I have been a Herman Wouk fan for many years. In fact, I often will choose one of his books without considering the title. This one was a disappointment and I found I was forcing myself to get to the end hoping for some kind of Wouk magic. Sorry, but it just didn't happen. But I'll keep reading Herman Wouk.

Jennifer H says

I guess it might've been more timely if I had been reading this book when they tried to use the SSC in Europe

- but this is all still a very current topic. Raising fears of US vs. China (the new threat) and comparing it to the science race of the US vs. Russia is also timely. Plus, yeah, it was a gigantic waste of money to stop the project, and I really do bet that the economic impact of those people in Texas was terrible. Because these scientific endeavors are so expensive, you either have crazy Richard Branson funding them or the government. Both are risky investors, I'm sure. But I think that's it is all very important because we can't just exist in the world, we do need to learn about it! Throw in some Enquirer type intrigue about the scientists and you could really see this all happening in Washington. It's believable to a non-scientist like me.

Gerald Kinro says

Guy Carpenter, a 60-year-old physicist is married, the father of two, including a new baby and lives a quiet ordinary life. He once worked on the Superconducting Super Collider, a gigantic federally funded project in Texas aimed at finding the elusive Higgs boson subatomic particle. Congress defunded the project leaving Carpenter out to dry and the Higgs boson a mystery, leaving a large hole in Texas. Now Chinese scientists publish a work that claims to have discovered the Higgs boson. Carpenter's quiet life is now chaotic. He was once romantically involved with a key member of the Chinese team, Dr. Wen Mei Li, while a grad student at Cornell. Was Carpenter a leak since he once worked on the project? Congress and perhaps the CIA want to know. A beautiful movie star turned congresswoman becomes interested in him. An ambitious reporter is at his tail and can ruin him.

For those expecting another "The Winds of War" or "The Caine Mutiny" it falls short. It is a simple, fast-paced read. At times it dragged, and the dialog was often trite and canned. Nevertheless, it still held my attention. The best part of the story is its satirical nature as Wouk jabs at congress, the media, and Hollywood.

Mary Banken says

Interesting mixture of science, politics and romantic drama. Same old story-- scientific progress is hopelessly embroiled in the other two! Back in the day I had some exposure to the Superconducting Super Collider project due to my job at the time, which heightened the interest level for me.

Phrodrick says

Have you ever heard about the Higgs Boson Blues?
I'm going down to Geneva, baby
Gonna teach it to you
Who cares?
Who cares what the future brings?

Fm: The Higgs Boson Blues, Nick Cage and the Bad Seeds, release 2013

Herman Wouk's A Hole in Texas is not bad. It is not the bitterly acerbic satire of Heller's Catch 22, nor is it the soaring heroics of Wouk's own Winds of War. Much of the history and science is correct. Further Wouk

is a capable writer. He is not a first rank novelist and this novel neither hurts nor helps his reputation. It affirms family values but I cannot see it being of much interest to YA or younger readers. So a solid middle ground read. Too long for an airplane read and maybe a good weekend at the beach read.

Herman Wouk introduces his novel with the notion that Particle Physicists having been the leading science that gave us the Nuclear Bomb and later Nuclear Power had become the darlings of the several congresses that willingly signed checks to allow them to research ever more obscure and remote ideas. Then came the effort to build the Super Collider. After a lot of sectional politics a contract was awarded to begin construction in Waxahachie Texas. A 54 mile underground ring was dug and many of the expensive supplies and support material had been delivered when in 1993 it was cancelled.

A key problem in high energy physics at that time was that results at each new level of energy required a disproportionately larger new device to generate the energy to achieve each new level of analysis. Building and operating a super collider is a lot of money (initial outlay \$4.4 Billion USD starting 1987). By 1993 not all of the physical properties had been rendered into agreed engineering design. Congress cut off funding turned instead to the Space Station. The Large Hadron Collider (CERN) in Switzerland, operating in international cooperation was where in 2012 the Higgs Boson was discovered.

No longer content to call it by its given name, press coverage at the time dubbed it the ‘God Particle’. The theory being that it is the Higgs Boson that converts energy into matter.

Writing in 2004 Wouk retells the Super Collider story and much of the science with several novelistic twists. In his version it is the Chinese who make the discovery and America responds with a lot of finger pointing, with the added urgency that a potential Boson Bomb would instantly render every nuclear weapon unimportant.

The media frenzy is such that Congress is forced into a lot of investigating, CYA over its prior decision and even Hollywood wants a piece in its effort to grind out a sci-fi movie before the public can get bored and move to the next crisis.

All of this is grist for a great deal of mostly gentle satire and poking of fun. Most of the characters are either nice, well-meaning and none truly villainous. The center of the media storm is a scientist, no longer young, once in the second string in the project to build the Texas Collider and now in the second string to build a Space Telescope. We meet Guy Carpenter a family man with a nerdy bachelor’s past who loves his sometimes fierce wife, his new daughter and their shared passion/devil their cat. Of course his past links him with the Chinese Scientist who led the effort to find the Higgs. And to round out the romantic side of the plot there is a widowed ex actress turned Congress woman who needs Guy’s brains and may be susceptible to his nice guy charms.

For those not entirely taken in with the pacing of the novel, too many long e mails, and the various shenanigans of the plot, (Did he then and will he now?). It can be fun to decide which of the fictional characters are supposed to be which real people. Too often the veil of fiction is paper thin. For example if you missed that the Jewish Lawyer is supposed to be Alan Dershowitz; is the reference to a prior case involving O.J. Simpson enough of a give away?

Altogether not a bad book, but hardly a must read. Were this a play, the headlines would be: “A light hearted look into science, politics, movies, the media and the human heart. Song and Music by Sondheim.”

Paul Page says

My father-in-law devoured books like I devour tortilla chips. He passed away this spring and we have been gathering an organizing his collection of books that must have once numbered nearly a thousand. I found "A Hole In Texas" on one of his shelves and was amazed to find out that Herman Wouk is still alive. He wrote this book in 2004.

So funny to read something by Wouk that involves super colliders and cell phones. I remember him for such classics as "The Caine Mutiny", "Winds of War" and "War and Remembrance."

"A Hole in Texas" is based on a super-conducting, super-collider project that was begun in Texas during the Reagan years and killed during the Clinton years. The scenario is that the Chinese have just captured the elusive Higgs boson, which sets off a round of soul searching and finger pointing in Washington. Guy Carpenter, a physicist who worked on the project, is thrust into the madness.

The book reads more like a Christopher Buckley novel than what I remember about Herman Wouk. The dialog is snappy, the characters are cartoonish and the pace is quick. I found "A Hole in Texas" to be an easy and fun read.

Debby says

I am NOT a science person, so I can't vouch for the authenticity of the scientific detail, but since the character was known for being able to explain complicated scientific information to laymen in the story, it follows that even I could understand what was discussed in the book. Kind of a quirky, fast read with everything from Hollywood scripts, to physics to congresswomen talking to their dead husbands.
